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# BEHIND THE THRONE









ARTHUR JOHN BIGGE  
(LORD STAMFORDHAM)

*Vanity Fair*

# BEHIND THE THRONE

By  
PAUL H. EMDEN

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## TO MY WIFE

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

*I am greatly indebted to the Publishers  
who made this book possible—to Mr. Philip  
Guedalla for his encouragement and for  
writing the Prologue—to Miss Louise Lauer  
who gave so much valuable help*

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## PROLOGUE

MY DEAR EMDEN,

There is little need for me to tell you, and still less for me to tell your readers, that the most effective part of any British institution is the part that is never mentioned in books. The combined intelligence of Anson and Erskine May has explored our Parliamentary system and reported their discoveries at length; but the collective instinct of the House of Commons, which is the only reason why it works, has hitherto defied analysis. The rules which make up the Common Law of England and the still more elusive principles of Equity are catalogued in a wilderness of textbooks; but I doubt if you will find anywhere an authoritative exposition of the invisible relation between Bench and Bar, which is the indispensable lubricant of the whole system. That, perhaps, is why most attempts to copy British institutions in other countries are unsuccessful. For the copyist confines himself in the majority of cases to a patient reproduction of externals, which are the least effective part of the whole affair.

True of most things on our mysterious island, this is profoundly true of the most valued institution of them all. For the Crown functions with a smooth efficiency which must be envied by all the exiled monarchs who watch it sadly from the windows of Swiss health-resorts. One of the reasons (though not, by any means, the only one) is the presence somewhere in its works of an invisible component called the Private Secretary. You will not find him in the books. His presence is, so far as I know, quite unrecognised in the rubrics of the Coronation Service. But if he got his due, he would be entitled to stand

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behind the throne bearing some emblem of his high calling, or to ride through Westminster Hall challenging all comers to deceive the Crown, if they could, into doing the wrong thing. For his beneficent activities are uniformly concentrated upon finding judicious answers to a formidable array of exceedingly hard questions, which raise in almost every instance problems of tact. And let it not be thought that tact is a secondary matter, a mere amenity of life without which things would go on just as before. For the successful conduct of foreign affairs depends principally on tact (that is why some European Powers are perpetually complaining in a bewildered way that nobody loves them); and, for all the mysterious provisions of the Statute of Westminster, the British Empire is mainly held together by tact.

That elusive circumstance gives their importance to these invisible advisers of the Crown. There was a time, of course, when the Crown needed no advisers, because the volume of its public and semi-public business could still be handled with the assistance of its Ministers and a few clerks. But that idyllic epoch of our monarchy faded before the onset of the Nineteenth Century. As the march of mechanical development (no less than that of Empire) multiplied the Sovereign's duties, there were more and more letters to be written – and it was so important that they should always be the right letter. This perpetual need for discretion was the soil from which Baron Stockmar, that paragon of the discreet, protruded his shy blossom. Nothing was more needed than a study of this *Eminence grise* of the Victorian hierarchy; and you were admirably qualified to make it by your bilingual accomplishments.

I will not anticipate the contents of your book by an unappetising forecast in the manner of those Chairmen's speeches which render public life almost unbearable. But it is quite enough to say that you have done a piece of work which really needed doing – and that is more than can be

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said of most books. We have all wanted to hear more about the men who stood discreetly in the background of the Victorian scene—more about General Grey whose influence over his royal mistress might, if he had lived, have spared her some of the asperity which marred her subsequent relations with Mr. Gladstone, and more about Sir Henry Ponsonby, whose unobtrusive statesmanship was one of the most valuable assets of her later years. More recent times increase the difficulties of your research; but nothing is more manifest than the unvarying good judgment displayed for so many years by Lord Stamfordham, whose selection for his post was a magnificent example of that British haphazard by which Continental logic is so often baffled. For who could predict that Lieutenant Bigge, returning from Zululand with the sad details of the Prince Imperial's death, would grow into a statesman trusted by three Sovereigns? Such chances are sometimes a better guide to the discovery of talent than the mechanical promotions of party politics. It is a great tradition; and it may be hoped that we have not yet reached the end of this happy catalogue.

Your enquiry follows paths of the greatest interest; and your readers are fortunate in making the excursion in such pleasant company. My own enjoyment of the trip is my excuse for this unnecessary Prologue.

PHILIP GUEDALLA.

*June, 1934.*



## CONSTITUTIONAL BACKGROUND

THE English Constitution is an organic entity, and, being unwritten and not confined in paragraphs, has been able to remain a living thing. Its deepest meaning is expressed in the duality of the Government – through advice and through consent. The King who never dies, as he is the life-tenant of a perpetual institution, has qualities possessed by no other human being; as he can do nothing without advice and without assistance, he can do no wrong. Everyone who gives the King wrong or bad advice is not only responsible to Parliament, but can also be called to account in the Courts of Justice. During the Middle Ages the King had around him learned men, mostly ecclesiastics, who conducted the royal correspondence. First called Clerks, later Secretaries, they became, towards the end of the reign of Elizabeth, Secretaries of State. As ‘His Majesty’s Servants,’ these Secretaries of State took over the chief posts of the Administration after the effective power had passed from the Privy Council to Parliament; their joint deliberations were called Councils of the Cabinet.

The modern Cabinet of to-day is no longer so small or so secret as it was even thirty years ago. Its sphere of work has grown; Ministries of Health, Education, Agriculture, and Air have been added. The Cabinet, consisting of the Secretaries, has its own Cabinet-Secretariat, with a staff of officials. Bureaucracy has grown everywhere.

Thus the King’s sphere of work has also grown; the details have become more complicated and less pleasant. So that he may be in a position to examine and judge the advice given him, the King must be informed, and assisted, by trustworthy and competent persons.

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The King's sworn advisers are the members of the Privy Council, which latter, in various forms and numerous committees, takes part in the Government. But only one of its committees is of decisive importance – the Cabinet, which bears collective responsibility for the advice which it gives to the King through the Prime Minister.

But this does not exhaust the King's share in the Government, nor is the preliminary work done which alone will enable him to arrive at an opinion. To form this link between Crown and Cabinet, to fill this gap, is the sphere of the Private Secretary. To prescribe the limits of his activities, to fix once for all the sphere of his influence, is impossible. The ability of the Sovereign, the tact of the Private Secretary, must complement each other, and find their level. Man is more than Constitutions.

The first and second Georges were not interested in, and understood practically nothing of, English affairs. George III had a valuable assistant in Sir Herbert Taylor, who was the more important as, in addition to the King's blindness, his mental incapacity grew more and more. Parliament had objected to Colonel Macmahon being appointed Private Secretary to George IV; the King found a way out by appointing Sir William Knighton to an office at Court in connection with which he could carry out the duties of Private Secretary. William IV, who caused the Cabinet frequent difficulties, recalled Taylor.

Not until the reign of Queen Victoria were the rights and duties of a Constitutional Monarch correctly exercised. Shortly after her accession to the Throne she sent for the experienced and trustworthy Sir Herbert Taylor in order to ask him what she should do in regard to a Private Secretary. 'Is Your Majesty afraid of the work?' he countered. And to the Queen's 'No' came Sir Herbert's reply, 'Then don't have a Private Secretary.' This advice does not lack a certain vigour, but it could not be followed by a young and inexperienced Monarch, who in addition was a woman.

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After Melbourne, who for a time combined the office of Premier with the functions of Private Secretary, and Albert, her husband, we have Stockmar, Grey, Ponsonby, and Bigge (afterwards Lord Stamfordham), who in succession were the unofficial advisers of the Queen.

There was not the least doubt in authoritative circles that Private Secretaries were indispensable, and, long before they were officially recognised, their necessity was proved by a letter from Palmerston, when Prime Minister, to the acting Private Secretary, Sir Charles Phipps: 'As to the Queen, her steady adherence to and studious observance of the principles and practice of the Constitution have, during the whole of her reign, been appreciated and admitted by men of all political parties. One great security for the Throne in this country is the maxim that the Sovereign can do no wrong. This does not mean that no wrong can be done; but it means that, as the Sovereign accepts and acts by the advice of those Ministers who, for the time being, enjoy the confidence of the Crown, it is those Ministers, and not the Sovereign personally, upon whom must fall the blame or criticism which any acts of the Royal Prerogative may produce. . . . *A strict observance of these fundamental principles does not, however, preclude the Sovereign from seeking from all quarters from whence it can be obtained the fullest and most accurate information regarding matters upon which the responsible Ministers may from time to time tender advice, and upon which it is not only right but useful that the Sovereign should form an opinion, to be discussed with the Ministers, if it should differ from the tendered advice.*'<sup>1</sup>

Edward VII too, who, contrary to his mother, dealt with State business so far as possible by personal discussion and verbal communication, used his Private Secretaries to collect information for him, and prepare him for his responsibilities.

Men who, during the reign of the Great Queen and the reign of her son, exercised a far greater influence than the

<sup>1</sup> The italics are not in the original.



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world gives them credit for, whose very names are hardly known to the public at large, are the subjects of these essays – men without official position and mere Private Secretaries.

The Constitution does not know a Private Secretary; nor did it know a Prime Minister, who figures for the first time under this name in an official document during Disraeli's second Cabinet, and who only received 'place and precedence' during the reign of Edward VII. Still less did the Constitution know a Prince Consort.

Albert had to create for himself his position, which no one gave him and which all contested. With a sense of humour which he did not often exhibit he himself wrote as to this to Stockmar:

Peel cut down my income, Wellington refused me rank, the Royal Family cried out against the foreign interloper, the Whigs in office were inclined to concede me just as much space as I could stand upon. The Constitution is silent as to the Consort of the Queen; even Blackstone ignores him; and yet there he was, not to be done without.

No King could do without a Private Secretary, and no King will ever be able to do without a Private Secretary. But the Constitution has retained the power and the ability to adapt itself to necessities – even to a Prince Consort – which at times must have been exceedingly awkward. Private Secretaries also are necessities; the Constitution has been, and surely will be, able to adapt them also for the public advantage.

“Dildawn,”

Bourne End.

# THE AGE OF POWER



# BARON STOCKMAR



## BARON STOCKMAR

**R**OUGHLY a hundred and twenty years ago, round about the time of the Vienna Congress, the utmost that anyone outside Germany knew of Coburg was that it was the capital of the Duchy of Saxe-Coburg (-Saalfeld; Gotha was not added till later), one of the many petty German States, only a few square miles in extent. Circumstances and possibilities in this tiny country were so limited that a capable young man, whether a member of the princely house or a commoner, who wanted to do something, or become somebody, had to leave the country and enter foreign service. Thus Prince Josias, after fighting against the Turks and then, not quite so successfully, against the Armies of the French Revolution, had attained the rank of Field Marshal in the Austrian Army. This was the prize and the bravura-piece of the dynasty and of the country.

But barely a generation later much more information was available about Coburg. There were even people, whose opinion counted, who thought that it was too well known, that it had made itself far too well known, and that it would not be at all a bad thing if one or other of the Coburg people had remained at home. One sat on Belgium's new Throne, after having narrowly escaped becoming King of Greece; another occupied the Portuguese Throne; and in Brazil the wife of the Emperor was a Coburger. Two of the young Princes were sons-in-law of the King of France, whose daughter, again, had married a Coburger. And by the side of England's Throne stood a Coburger as Prince Consort.

In the next generation, Coburg was the Ruling House in

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England, a Coburger was Empress of Germany, and a branch reigned in Bulgaria.

This all followed an entirely 'peaceful conquest.' There had been no revolutionary happenings nor great events. No battles had been fought nor campaigns won. The Coburgers – cool and thoughtful men, who brought order and system into everything which they undertook – were clever enough to recognise the limits of their own abilities, and they took a manager. Resourceful, always behind the scenes and never in the glaring light of the stage, this curious man, who was not a statesman and had not studied diplomacy, went forward step by step, systematically and pedantically. The rise of the House of Coburg from historical darkness to the centre of European history, out of small circumstances to prestige and power, is due to the work and the merits of one man – Dr. Stockmar.

The history of Stockmar, his life, his position, are unique; his influence on the leading men of his time and on events enormous. And yet must we not to-day – just as sixty years ago, when, ten years after his death, people began to think of him – ask the same question, 'Who was Stockmar?' Reputation does not always follow merit, and it is true of this man, too, that his contemporaries hardly knew him, and posterity knows little about him. It was his wish to stand in the shadows and '*mener une existence anonyme et souterraine*' – lead in battle but himself remain invisible. At the same time he was fully aware of his worth and his importance, was not without vanity, and was thoroughly convinced of the great value of his advice. It is said of him that he had something like dread of publicity, and had avoided renown. Too much humility is sometimes nothing but a kind of pride.

Who was Stockmar? This little German country doctor, who in himself had nothing which could in any way be called romantic, became, surely by a romantic fate, a man of outstanding personality who was on the most confidential

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footing with most of the European Sovereigns of his time, knew all their secrets and weaknesses, and could exercise such a strong influence at the English Court that the Ministers of the Early Victorian Age had to reckon with him, the 'most kind, eccentric, infallible, and unfathomable German who for twenty years had no small share in governing us.'

Charlotte, the daughter and only child of George IV, was a charming young lady, and her royal father's daughter; hence her (short) life was very exciting. But, apart from this 'past,' she had a future which in fact was to prove illusory: she was the heiress to the English Throne. First she wanted to marry the Prince of Orange; then she took an interest in the Prussian Prince Augustus and had secret meetings with him; and finally began an extensive flirtation with a certain Captain Hess. The fourth runner in this race was Leopold of Coburg, who had small chance of being 'placed.' Although George IV, at the time still Prince Regent, was not particularly qualified to play the guardian of morals and good manners, yet he made intensive use of paternal right and kingly power, and locked Charlotte up in Windsor. The Princes of Orange and Prussia, as well as the commoner Hess, vanished, were gone, and dropped out of the race. The Coburger had won in a canter, and his faithfulness found its well-deserved reward: together with the hand of the merry Charlotte he obtained the claim to be allowed at some future date to be the husband of a Queen of England.

The household of the young couple was set up in Claremont, and the small Court included, as personal doctor of the Prince, a fellow-countryman whom he had brought with him from Coburg – Christian Friedrich Stockmar.

The existence of the latter had until then been colourless and uneventful. After the Public School education usual in the world of officials, he visited the small Universities of Jena, Erlangen, and Wuerzburg to study medicine. Many



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years later Stockmar writes of those days: 'It was a clever stroke, to have originally studied medicine; without the knowledge thus acquired, without the psychological and physiological experiences which I thus obtained, my *savoir-faire* would often have gone a-begging.' Quite decidedly Stockmar had retained all the advantages, but also all the disadvantages, of the medical man of those days for his future activities, which were to be so very different. He could quickly recognise a complicated situation and make a diagnosis; still more quickly he had a remedy at hand – the only one which in his view could be used and which was of infallible effect.

In Claremont he was bored, and the more so because the other members of the Court looked down with a certain contempt on the plebeian foreign doctor. He occupied his free time in studying English history and English Constitutional questions, and in writing down painfully accurate character-studies of all persons whom he saw at the Court. Thus he says of Wellington that he was fond at table of whispering rather doubtful stories to Princess Charlotte; that she showed appreciation of them and laughed heartily is no more surprising than the fact that Wellington told them.

With the Prince and Princess, Stockmar was on the best of terms. The merry Charlotte liked her 'Stocky,' and had much fun with him, for he, in spite of his weak health and an inclination to hypochondria, would yet at times be very merry and gay. The marriage which, after so many handicaps, had really turned out quite well, found his full approval, and with a touch of humour he wrote in his diary: 'My master is the best of all husbands in all the five quarters of the globe; and his wife bears him an amount of love, the greatness of which can only be compared with the English national debt.' By the side of the dutiful and virtuous man whom Stockmar called his 'glorious master, a manly prince and princely man,' Charlotte had changed, much to her advantage; if formerly she had kicked over the traces, this

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was perhaps due only to her former surroundings and the bad example which she saw in her parents. She herself once declared to Stockmar: 'My mother was bad, but she would not have become as bad as she was if my father had not been infinitely worse.'

The nation at this time had no reason to look up to its Rulers with particular respect. George III was blind and practically mad, and the Prince Regent was as his daughter described him. In addition, times were quite particularly bad. After the Napoleonic wars, trade was at a deadlock in all its branches, unemployment had reached critical proportions, and in some industrial towns there had been noisy gatherings and riots. All hopes of better times concentrated on Charlotte, the heiress to the Throne, and her popularity grew still more when it became known that in Claremont a child might be expected which would one day rule over England in succession to its mother. The extraordinary interest which the nation took in this child is shown by an entry in Stockmar's diary: 'Bets for enormous sums have long been made on the sex of the expected child, and it has been already calculated on the Stock Exchange that a Princess would only raise the funds  $2\frac{1}{2}$  per cent, whilst a Prince would send them up 6 per cent. In order to obtain sure intelligence respecting the condition of the Princess as soon as possible, the Ambassadors of the highest Powers have paid me, the poor doctor, the most friendly and obliging visits.'

But the visits were paid in vain, and things turned out very differently.

Stockmar was the physician of the Prince, not the Physician-in-Ordinary of the Princess, although he might have become so if he had tried. Thus he had nothing to do with Charlotte's confinement, and could refuse to interfere in any way during the months of pregnancy. In addition to the Physician-in-Ordinary, Dr. Baillie, Sir Richard Croft was called in as specialist. Stockmar has written with

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regard to those months: 'I can only thank God that I never allowed myself to be blinded by vanity, but always kept in view the danger that must necessarily accrue to me if I arrogantly and imprudently pushed myself into a place in which a foreigner could never expect to reap honour, but possibly plenty of blame. I knew the hidden rocks too well, and knew that the national pride and contempt for foreigners would accord no share of honour to me if the result were favourable, and, in an unfavourable issue, would heap all the blame on me. As I had before at various times, when the physician was not at hand, prescribed for the Princess, these considerations induced me to explain to the Prince that, from the commencement of her pregnancy, I must decline all and any share in the treatment'; and later, 'When I recall all the circumstances, I feel but too vividly the greatness of the danger which I escaped.'

Assuredly Stockmar had escaped from a great danger. Very coolly, very logically, he had considered and decided. There could thus be no question of a Doctor's Dilemma for him; at the crossroads he had decided for the dangerless path, which could carry no kind of responsibility with it. The future politician had considered discretion as the better part of valour; but whether the then physician acted correctly is another question.

The Ministers, the Archbishop of Canterbury, the great Dignitaries of State, had gathered at Claremont to await the birth of the young heir to the Throne, but a dead boy was born. Five hours later Charlotte was dead too.

As to these hours, decisive for the English Reigning House and for the House of Coburg, the diary relates that Croft came to Stockmar to inform him that the Princess was dangerously ill, and that he ought to prepare the Prince for the worst. He insisted that Stockmar should look after the patient. 'I hesitated, but at last I went with him. . . . Baillie said to her, "There comes an old friend of yours." She stretched out her left hand eagerly to me, and pressed

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mine twice vehemently. . . . Baillie kept giving her wine constantly. She said to me, "They have made me tipsy." . . . I had just left the room when she called out loudly, "Stocky! Stocky!"'

The task of telling the Prince of her death fell to Stockmar. 'I did so in no very definite words. He thought she was not yet dead, and on his way to her room he sank into a chair. I knelt by him; he thought it must be a dream; he could not believe it. He sent me once more to see about her; I came back and told him it was all over. Then we went to the chamber of death; kneeling by the bed, he kissed her cold hands, and then, raising himself up, he pressed me to him and said, "I am now quite desolate. Promise me always to sit with me." I promised.'

Stockmar kept this promise: no Prince could have had in his service a more unselfish friend, nor one who might more justly have said of himself, 'I seem to be here to care more for others than for myself, and am well content with this destiny.' But, for both, fate and history had great things in store.

Fate was unkind to Sir Richard Croft, with whom Stockmar kept in touch after the unlucky confinement. 'My mind is at present in a sad state. May God grant that neither you nor any connected with you may suffer what I do at this moment,' wrote Sir Richard, who could not forget the terrible hours at Claremont, or bear the responsibility which Stockmar had evaded. Croft's condition grew into a state of deepest anxiety and excitement bordering on insanity, so that he lost all command of himself. At the next difficult confinement which Sir Richard had to attend he became quite beside himself. In the room adjoining the sick-room he found a pistol. With this he shot himself. The patient was safely confined.

'Poor Croft,' exclaims Stockmar in his diary.

Leopold's English dream was finished, but the first step into the great world was taken, *et c'est toujours le premier pas*

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*qui coûte*. Leopold, the pacemaker for Coburg, had Claremont, a very ample annuity which Parliament had granted him, and he had Stockmar. He could afford to wait.

But the two Coburgers had longer to wait than they had expected before new possibilities dawned on the political or any other horizon. The long stay in Claremont was agreeably interrupted by journeys to France, Italy, and Germany, and Stockmar made good use of the time by not only continuing his studies of history and the English Constitution, but also by getting married. True it is that during the next twenty years he was not to see too much of his new family, for Stockmar exercised his profession *ambulando*. His position as doctor had given place to a more extensive one at the Court of the Prince; he looked after Leopold's private affairs as Secretary, became Keeper of the Privy Purse and Comptroller of the Household. Occupying this purely Court office, he had not long to wait for a Coburg title, and soon after was raised to the nobility.

The little doctor to an unimportant Princeling had now grown into the Chief Court Official and intimate confidant of a great gentleman. He became acquainted with the social and political life of England, and met many important and influential men. Insight into many things was gained, and the outlook broadened. And the opportunity to make use of the experience thus obtained arrived in due course: Leopold was offered the Throne of Greece, and there he intended – but other Princely Houses had the same intention – to set up a Coburg Dynasty.

It was at this time that the Romantics of all nations united, and believed it was possible to restore the ancient Hellenic glory by a new Renaissance. Byron was drawn to its 'Land of lost gods and godlike men,' and Wolfgang Mueller, the father of the German-English-Sanscrit Max Mueller who was to play his part in the posthumous Life of Stockmar, sang his Greek songs, 'Without thee, O Hellas, what would the world be!'

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Complicated and many-sided negotiations took place, which on Leopold's side were conducted by Stockmar and his brother Charles,<sup>1</sup> and on the Greek side by Kapodistrias. Further European candidates appeared, a European game of intrigues began, Leopold-Stockmar made conditions which the European Powers refused to accept. Aberdeen wrote to Leopold, 'The Powers have no intention whatever of negotiating with Your R.H. They expect a simple acceptance of their proposal, and would consider a conditional acceptance as a virtual refusal.' Stockmar was not prepared to advise his master to accept unconditionally, and thus the offer was finally refused. It is not quite clear what the Coburgers really wanted, nor is there any evidence that they seriously intended to exchange Claremont for the neighbourhood of the Acropolis. Perhaps they feared the Greeks, especially when they offered Crowns. Nor did Stockmar distinguish himself by his diplomacy. George IV was heartily amused by the attempt, and gave Leopold the nickname of 'Marquis Peu-à-Peu'; Europe looked upon him as an irresolute intriguer. Further, it must have been difficult for Leopold to arrive at a decision, for in the background there was always the possibility that, for lack of grown-up heirs, or of any heirs at all, he might be called to the Regency of England. True it is that Stockmar denies quite vigorously that his final advice to refuse was influenced by this possibility, but such views very often come *post hoc*. However this may be, the affair with Greece had fallen through, and, when it had fallen through, Stockmar blamed his master because he had not followed his advice.

Here we notice for the first time Stockmar's quality, which increased with the years, of looking upon his advice and upon himself as a 'display of oracular wisdom'; what he said was infallibly right; what he advised must lead to success. If his 'patients' – the practice of this former physician will yet be considerably extended, and he will write

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix 1.

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prescriptions for half Europe – do not strictly obey his instructions, he is always ready with his unpleasant ‘I told you so.’

The stages ‘England’ and ‘Greece’ were over. But as it is well known not only that ‘opportunity makes desire,’ but also that ‘opportunities, like eggs, come one at a time,’ just a year later another possibility dawned: Leopold was to become King of Belgium.

The Belgian Provinces had risen against Dutch Dominion, had declared themselves independent, and were now looking for a Ruler. Why should not a German Prince, who had felt in himself the ability first to become a good Englishman, then a good Greek, now also think himself capable of becoming a good Belgian? From the start Leopold had good expectations; competition was small, and, above all things, Europe could easily agree upon him, as everyone was willing that the little Dynasty of Coburg, which, at that time, occupied no European Throne apart from the home one, should have this little rise, and no one was jealous. Leopold could be sure of the consent of England and of Germany; thanks to his military past in Russia, the Empire of the Tsars was also for him. France raised objections, and Count Sebastiani threatened, ‘Si Saxe-Coburg met un pied en Belgique, nous lui tirerons des coups de canon’ (‘If Saxe-Coburg puts one foot into Belgium we shall fire our guns on him’). In order to overcome this obstacle, the cautious widower discovered in time his love for a daughter of the French King. (Louis-Philippe, the father-in-law, was very glad, after the Revolution and the loss of his throne, to find an asylum with his family in Claremont.)

The novelty in the formation of Belgium, the rise of a purely Constitutional State opposed to the reactionary Continental Europe, attracted Leopold and Stockmar. Extensive negotiations between the Belgian statesmen, the candidate to the Throne, and the European Cabinets made

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this problem, which in any case was not too simple, more and more complicated, till finally it became as complicated as later on the Schleswig-Holstein question, of which Palmerston had once said, 'Only two men really understood it. One of them, Prince Albert, is dead. I am the other – and I have forgotten all about it.' Stockmar was the right man to throw himself into such negotiations, to think of everything and to forget nothing. His influence on events grew steadily. Leopold, sitting still in Marlborough House and waiting and doing nothing without Stockmar, who had already hastened to Belgium, once wrote to him, 'My dear Stockmar, read the Constitution and give me your opinion.' Stockmar read, studied, wrote one memorandum after the other, and had already considered how the Court should be arranged – that a 'Lutheran Chapel is indispensable. People say, "We don't ask whether he is a Lutheran, but we ask whether he goes to his own Church in his own way."' Stockmar was able during these extensive and difficult negotiations never to drop out of the rôle of the *agent intime*. He never in any way touched, in the slightest degree, the departments of the official Belgian diplomats.

The Belgian question was settled, and, in spite of serious reverses at the start, was settled finally. A political work had arisen which was on a firm foundation, and stood so well that even the Great War, which in fact became a world war for the sake of Belgian neutrality, could not injure it. Within the meaning of the Coburg ambitions and within the meaning of the cautious Stockmar, the new State had come into being. Leopold could enter Brussels. Coburg had arrived.

But there remained much for the young State to do; it had to look for friends, to clear obstacles out of the way. Stockmar, at home in official London, was able to profit by his personal acquaintance with the leading English statesmen, with the diplomatic representative there of Prussia, Buelow, then with Bunsen, who once said of Stockmar that



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'the dear old original is incomparable,' an opinion which almost agrees with that of the Belgian count, Félix Mérode, 'C'est un original, mais quel honnête homme!' On an unofficial mission, as diplomatic agent, Stockmar went to London.

As 'diplomatic agent,' not as official and accredited Ambassador. Again, therefore, an activity which savours more of the backstairs than of the front entrance. He had his choice now, after the great success, of deciding as to the nature of his future activities. A high post in the new State had been offered to him, not only by Leopold, but Stockmar had refused it without hesitation. It may be this curious person was really not suited for ordinary official routine. But perhaps this man, always honest towards others, and sometimes even towards himself, felt that his abilities did not suffice to make him a real statesman. Cleverness, caution, forethought, to a certain extent — these were his qualities, but also *les défauts de ses vertus*. Every creative gift, every imagination, was lacking. Rousseau once said, 'The pedant and the teacher say nearly the same things; but the former on every occasion, the latter only when he is sure of their effect.' Stockmar had something of both; he was often a pedantic schoolmaster, and also assumed effect when he spoke. So Stockmar again preferred the anonymous activity of the man in the background, in the dark, in order to be a kind of plebeian Warwick the Kingmaker. But Stockmar never misused this darkness; he was anything but a mole or a go-between. He was clean, incorruptible, and it was due to this absolute trustworthiness that men of the most different types valued him. They had seen in their dealings with him that they were in safe hands, that they were dealing with a man who would never enter into intrigues or play off one politician against the other. Aberdeen saw Stockmar very clearly, and judged him very correctly, when he said of him, 'I have known men as clever, as discreet, as good, and with as much judgment;



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*Rischgitz*



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out I never knew anyone who united all these qualities as he did.' Van de Weyer, a great Belgian patriot, and one of the founders of the new State, wrote to Leopold after Stockmar had left: 'You have had the goodness, Sire, to say how much I must regret the absence of Baron Stockmar; his departure does in truth leave a great void. He has had for me all the love and care of a father, as I have for him all the affection of a son. I shall never forget the wise counsels which I owe to his friendship.' About this time Leopold, in order to introduce Stockmar to a statesman, gave a description of him which is highly informing as to the relation between master and servant: 'My private secretary, Baron Stockmar, has been with me for many long years; he has been the witness of the days of my happiness; later, when it pleased Providence to overwhelm me with misfortunes which I almost had not the strength to bear, he was my faithful support and friend. He has refused every other lot, every career which has been repeatedly offered him, in order to devote himself to my service, and I do not deny that he is my friend rather than my servant.' But to the very official Belgian biographer, Theodore Juste, the recognition, especially that of Van de Weyer, appears to be somewhat too strong; according to his view, Stockmar has 'rendered undoubted services to our country. But in recognising and stating them we must not exaggerate. The rôle of Stockmar, after all, was that of a secret agent and without responsibility. In this capacity he gave advice. But, without depreciating the worth of Baron Stockmar in any way, we must say that his hidden work cannot be compared with the memorable activity of those men who publicly connected their names with the events and deeds which form the history of the foundation.' A not uninteresting opinion, which at the same time is informing as to the extent to which Stockmar's responsible collaborators must have felt it irresponsible advice to be disagreeable. Van de Weyer seems to have had in mind the saying of Blake, 'Opinions

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concerning acts are not history; acts themselves are history.'

Apart from his work for Belgium, Stockmar had to attend to many matters in London for Leopold personally. Leopold could, of course, no longer claim the annuity which had been granted to him as future Consort. As King of Belgium he renounced, but as clever Coburger he attached conditions to the renunciation. Claremont was to be fully maintained; pensions were to be paid to his former employees and those of Charlotte. Thus Stockmar became an English pensioner, and entered into financial relations with England which are not without humour. In most cases jokes lose their point with the years; in this case the point gets better and better.

Meanwhile many changes had taken place at the Court of St. James's, and many more were in preparation.

With the death of Charlotte the House of Hanover had lost the last legitimate descendant in the third generation. The succession was in danger – a most serious matter, which, however, was met in a worthy manner. Amongst the sons of George III there began a wild flight into matrimony. First the Duke of Cambridge, a fortnight later the Duke of Kent, and yet a fortnight later the Duke of Clarence (William IV) entered the bonds of wedlock. The fifty-one-year-old Duke of Kent passed from the gentle hands of Madame St. Laurents into the energetic hands of the Dowager Princess of Leiningen, a Saxe-Coburg, the sister of Leopold of Belgium. When the time had nearly arrived, the successful couple moved in an adventurous journey from the modest Castle of Amorbach, in Hessia, to the Royal Palace of Kensington, and here the heiress to the Throne was born. It was again a girl: Alexandrina Victoria, who had reached the age of fifteen when Stockmar came from Brussels to London.

With the birth of every Princess, especially if she had expectations of a Throne, a new and most fruitful field of activity opened before Stockmar. If later Princes received the name of Father-in-Law, another that of Uncle of

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Europe, Stockmar must be called the Marriage Broker of Europe. The first marriage which came off under his auspices was that of Maria da Gloria, the eldest daughter of the Emperor Pedro of Brazil, King of Portugal, with Ferdinand of Saxe-Coburg. Stockmar attended to everything, prepared the diplomatic roads, procured the money, and also saw to it that the young Prince to some extent prepared himself for his future career as King, a title which he soon obtained. Stockmar refused even to consider the wish of the cautious father that England should guarantee the marriage contract, and said, 'Nothing venture, nothing have.' Even caution has its limits. But before everything the young gentleman had to take a look at the great world outside, 'in order to prepare him gradually, by an attentive observation of great Courts and by the advice and example of his Uncle Leopold, for his future position.' Stockmar reports to Brussels as to these plans: 'The best opportunity for making acquaintance with really great society, with politics, and life as it is, is to be found in Brussels, for the near relationship of the young Prince to the Court will smooth many difficulties in his first *début*. If the Queen of the French is to be in Brussels at the same time with some of her children, so much the better. The Prince can have no better example than this family, so admirably brought up, and it is politically important for him to make acquaintance with them. His *début* in London will be more difficult. But the impression he makes in England will precede him to Lisbon, and on it will partly depend the success he will meet with there. What England can and will give is this: a friendly reception at Court, an English man-of-war for the voyage to Portugal, and decided instructions to Howard de Walden [the Minister at Lisbon] for *bons offices*, assistance, and support.' Of the friendly assistance of England the young gentleman might be assured, since Palmerston had written to Stockmar: 'My dear Baron, — Many thanks for your letter of the 9th, which gives me your view of the

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bridegroom and the marriage. Your account of the young Prince is sufficiently good. If he is tall and stoops a little it will be said he is only condescending, for the Portuguese are generally short, and he will be considered as studiously inclined to give ear to his subjects. However, joking apart, he belongs to a good race, and there can be no doubt of his turning out well, both morally and physically, and I think the Portuguese and their Queen are very fortunate in the choice which has been made. I shall write to Howard by to-day's mail, and instruct him to take the necessary steps for urging a ratification.'

Not only the Throne of Portugal, but that of Spain also, and a year later that of England, were occupied by young ladies. The Coburgers were able to put forward a rich choice of well-educated, good-looking, and well-built young gentlemen. But the Orleans family was in the same position, and a kind of friendly competition began – a competition which later, in the case of the Spanish marriages, nearly ended in an unfriendly manner. The parties here interfered just a little too much with each other's plans, and Stockmar's strong dislike for France, which sometimes degenerated into a quite undiplomatic rage, is surely due to this most painful Comedy of Errors which for a long time caused great excitement in Europe.

But the greatest marriage, in the realisation of which Stockmar not only collaborated, but which he foresaw and promoted from the very earliest days of the two future spouses, was the cause of his greatest and most decisive rise in life.

Perhaps it was even Frau Siebold, the Coburg midwife, who first thought of a future marriage, when, with practised hands, she first in the foreign Kensington Palace assisted a girl baby, and a few months later, at home in Roscnau, assisted a boy baby into this world. Assuredly Augusta of Coburg, however, the common grandmother, who had long been dead when matters had gone so far, had considered a

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possible marriage of her two grandchildren. The plan took more definite shape when the probability that the young ady would one day ascend the English Throne became a certainty, and Leopold-Stockmar took it into their strong and capable hands: Victoria and Albert were to become a pair.

When Victoria ascended the Throne, Leopold was forty-seven, Stockmar fifty. How strongly both must have felt – almost a generation had passed since then and a new generation had grown up – that history repeats itself. Instead of the uncle, it was now the nephew who should one day stand beside the Throne of England, and it was again Stockmar's task to prepare him for the position, to smooth the way.

Assuredly the *leitmotiv* in the life of both – master as well as adviser – was Coburg for ever, may Coburg grow great. But it must be stressed – and everyone who reads the correspondence of those years must feel it – that as regards this particular marriage project they were both not actuated only by the interests of the House of Coburg. Leopold, whose feeling towards the fatherless girl was more than that of a guardian and adviser, almost that of father, was much too fond of her to use her as a pawn in the politics of his House. And Stockmar carried out his task with the whole of his great devotion to duty, his strong feeling, his great honesty and truthfulness. Two decades later, when the Queen's daughter was on the point of marrying the Prussian Prince, and a proposal for some change in the ceremonial arrived from Berlin, the mother sent the answer: 'It is not every day that one marries the daughter of the Queen of England.' How rare, then, must be the days on which one marries the Queen of England herself! Stockmar was fully alive to the great responsibility which he shouldered when he assisted in the carrying out of such a plan.

But previous to this, Stockmar had to carry out another mission, as delicate as the marriage project and equally



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charged with the greatest responsibility. He had to stand by the side of the eighteen-year-old Queen when she ascended the Throne.

Exactly one day after the declaration of the majority of Victoria, Stockmar arrived in London. Leopold had fully instructed him and written to Victoria: 'You have now the Baron at your elbow. Speak sometimes with him; it is necessary to accustom you to the thing.' Victoria knew exactly what she had in her Baron. 'Most wholesome, prudent, sound and excellent advice was given me by our good and invaluable friend. . . . I am happy and thankful to have Stockmar here. He possesses my entire confidence.' He had not long to wait—just a bare month, and William IV was dead. On the day of her Accession we find four times in the diary of the young Queen the entry, 'Saw Stockmar.'

Melbourne looked after the young and inexperienced Monarch to such an extent that he became her Prime Minister, her tutor, and her Private Secretary. No one had any objection to raise to this, not even Peel or Wellington. Melbourne lived mostly in the Castle, and it has been worked out that he spent, every day, about six hours with the Queen. 'He gave himself up in a far greater degree than a Premier is wont to do to personal intercourse with the Queen.' Victoria discussed everything, including non-political matters, with him. As Taylor had advised her, she had no actual Private Secretary. Quite apart from the question whether this state of things was necessary or exaggerated from the strictly Constitutional point of view, whether it was convenient or inconvenient for the youthful august Lady who, after all, was not yet quite 'accustomed to the thing,' there was one party whom it assuredly could not suit—the Coburg-Belgian party. They would have been completely cut out, and this was not their intention after so much labour. The capable Stockmar, then, was able to discover that, in spite of Melbourne's almost constant attendance, there still remained a gap, as it was impossible that

everything should be settled by the Prime Minister in personal conversation with the Queen. It was denied, even by the Tories, that there was ever such a gap except in Stockmar's imagination. But – Stockmar was called in to fill it.

Again he tried to remain in the background. At first it was Fräulein Lehzen who was suspected of exercising an irresponsible influence behind the Throne. Stockmar took care to remain invisible – if possible, not even to be mentioned. All the same, it was impossible to remain entirely invisible, never to be noticed, as he visited his small dwelling – first in Davies Street, then in Holles Street – but seldom, but lived with the Court, first in Kensington Palace, then in Buckingham Palace or Windsor. This gradually became known in wider and wider circles, and the feeling of distrust towards this unconstitutional and, in addition, un-English and foreign influence became so strong that Melbourne was forced to protect the Queen and to state publicly that Stockmar was not the Private Secretary of the Queen. This denial, 'if not technically, was virtually true.' But there can be no doubt at all that Stockmar was consulted on everything – political events and questions of the day.

The counsels which Uncle Leopold gave in addition, either direct or through Stockmar, were wise, well considered, and would, if collected, form quite a good guide for candidates for a Throne. But later on they became not quite so unselfish, lost their value, and were no longer very welcome. Victoria to Albert: 'Uncle Leopold appears to me to be nettled because I no longer ask for his advice, but dear Uncle is given to believe that he must rule the roast everywhere.'

For Leopold and his youthful State it was of the very utmost importance to have an influential political *pied-à-terre* at the Court of St. James's. The advice given to the girl-Queen 'to have every request for a decision in writing and to take time to consider,' sounds more as if Stockmar had suggested it. It was followed by the Queen to the day of her

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death. The system had enormous advantages, but it also had its disadvantages. It was a heavy task for the much over-worked Ministers, and often the cause of unfortunate delays. The scrupulous order in the correspondence and the diaries kept by the Queen is also Stockmar's system; indirectly, therefore, it is due to him that it was possible to publish the mine of information contained in *Queen Victoria's Letters*.

Sometimes, however, the suggestions from Brussels were pedantic – schoolmasterly. Thus the Queen is advised 'for the next few years' to continue her studies 'on a more extended scale.' 'History, international law, political economy belles lettres and physical science, etc., etc. – the list would be very long if I were to enumerate it all. The sooner you do this, the better.' This savours strongly of the leaving certificate which Miss Barbara Pinkerton gave to her pupil Amelia Sedley: 'A careful and undeviating use of the back-board for four hours daily during the next three years is recommended.'

All this lecturing was, of course, to be given by Stockmar, who, in Leopold's eyes, was 'a living dictionary of all matters scientific and politic.'

We have no knowledge as to whether the Queen followed this advice, but from her answer, in which she thanks him for the letter 'full of kind and excellent advice,' but passes the 'lecture programme' over in silence, we may assume that her sound common sense prevented her from doing anything of the kind.

Could the Queen, and could the Coburgers, be surprised if as early as this the word *camarilla* reached them not very pleasantly from certain circles? It will be heard more often and more loudly when, after Victoria's wedding with the Coburger, Stockmar's influence likewise increases.

The plan to marry her Cousin Albert had not been looked upon by the Queen quite so enthusiastically since she sat on the Throne, and with a 'wait and see' she had somehow relegated it to the background. She was in no hurry.

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First of all she wanted to be quite sure that Albert suited her, that he was fitted for the position which he was to fill. Here again there was, of course, no one more capable of finding this out than the Baron, who had developed into a specialist in the art of turning young Princes into Princes Consort. In the family council of the Coburgers, in which Leopold, as paterfamilias, took the chair, and in which Stockmar had long since had equal power and equal voice, it was decided to place Albert into a kind of mental quarantine, and to send him for a year to Italy with Stockmar. Much caution is required in every step of life, and, as is the case of the finishing governess with her female pupils, Albert was to receive the finishing touches of his development from Stockmar.

The reports from Italy arrived with true 'Stockmarly' regularity, and left nothing to be desired from the point of view of detail. How the travellers spent their time, how Albert took in impressions and absorbed them, everything is faithfully reported. Of course, Albert kept a diary, which Stockmar supervised, and when, after a visit to the Pope, the entries turned out, in Stockmar's view, particularly apt and living, the pedantic gentleman felt 'very much tempted to send it for the inspection of Your Majesty.' So that no opportunity, no possibility should be missed to bring his pupil into amicable remembrance, always and from every point of view, reports were even sent to Fräulein Lehzen! Towards Albert, Stockmar was the fatherly friend, who never missed giving his opinion when he thought there was something he ought to blame. Sylvain de Weyer, Stockmar's collaborator in Belgium, had on one occasion asked Stockmar's advice on how best to carry out one's dealings with Princes. Stockmar at the time had answered: 'If you are consulted by Princes to whom you are attached, give your advice truthfully, boldly, without reserve or reticence. Should your opinion not be palatable, do not, to please or conciliate them, deviate for a moment from what

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you think the truth. You may, in consequence, be some time out of favour, treated with neglect or coldness. Never mind it, and, when they come back (for come back they will, if you remain honest and firm), never complain of the treatment you have received, never beg to make them own how right you were, and how wrong they have been.' Thus Stockmar, who never was 'that poor man that hangs on Princes' favours,' had, in accordance with his own excellent prescription, dealt with Leopold, and thus he now dealt with the nephew, who was a grateful pupil.

Pupil, not friend, as in the case of Leopold, who was almost of the same age as Stockmar; but Albert was about thirty years younger – only twenty – and of course without any experience which would have enabled him to form an opinion of Stockmar's instruction. Therefore his tutor's influence, both for good and evil, was the strongest. Under Stockmar's teaching the easily influenced young gentleman became the frenetic worker who later collapsed under the weight of business because he wasted himself on unnecessary trifles. No man can jump over his own shadow, and therefore it was not possible for Stockmar to make a statesman of Albert – because he himself was no statesman. He made him in his own image – into a punctual, diligent worker, into the pedantic writer of boring memoranda, into an excellent high official in the Civil Service. But Albert ought to have been educated for a leader.

Victoria's political education suffered from the same fault, for Uncle Leopold carried it out in the form of 'instruction by letters' until Stockmar took it in hand personally. Both methods, both points of view, however, were the same. The education by Fräulein Lehzen was assuredly the most accomplished and most refined which any young lady of the best society could have enjoyed. But here it was not a question of a young lady of the best society; we were dealing with the future Queen of England. Fräulein Lehzen<sup>1</sup> was

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix 2.

an excellent lady and first-rate teacher, with eminent knowledge and the very best manners. Quite apart from the fact that she was a German, had only German views and could therefore teach only German views, it was not to be expected from her that she should be able to prepare a future Monarch for her profession. It should have been the mother's place to call in for this purpose other capable experts – the best would have been just good enough – men who were thoroughly acquainted with the history and tradition of the country, who, if possible, would have brought personal experience to their task. But the mother had quite other interests, even opposed interests; she was anxious to keep her daughter as inexperienced as possible, so that she should not too quickly escape from her influence.

A great intrigue was intended – to exploit Victoria's youth and inexperience for the purpose of a small *coup d'état*. The Duchess of Kent and her Sir John Conroy – counsellor, majordomo, executor of the late Duke, friend and cavalier all in one – intended, on the death of William IV, whether this took place before or after the declaration of the majority of Victoria, to set up a Regency under the Duchess. Conroy was to become the Private Secretary of the future Queen, and, if the latter did not agree to everything, well, she would simply be locked up at Windsor until she did agree. Before the death of William IV the Duchess of Kent actually wrote to Melbourne that it was the wish of her daughter that eventually there should for a time be a Regency. Stockmar, who not only knew everything, but also heard everything and learnt everything, went to Melbourne to enlighten him as to events. Although Victoria knew nothing of this badly engineered intrigue, which after all savours somewhat of high treason, she hated Conroy – for other reasons – and immediately banished him from the Court when she became Queen. 'How is it possible that I can have any confidence in my mother when I know that whatever I say to her is immediately repeated to that man?' But, mindful of her

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uncle's counsel 'to avoid any breach with your mother,' she did not have any serious discussion with her, although the daughter later on plainly showed to her that she was now the Queen. The Duchess of Kent's circle therefore complained everywhere that the Queen was completely under the domination of Stockmar and Miss Lehzen.

The period before and after the Accession of the Queen would appear much more boring than it was in reality if Greville and Creevey had not had very sharp ears and very pointed pens and had not then written their diaries. They were perhaps a little too indiscreet, but they act as spotlights on a picture which without them would be far less effective and less interesting.

Both Victoria and Albert, Sovereign and Consort, were, owing to the defective disposition of the older generation, the educational product of the same man. Both had the same opinions, the same points of view. There was no compensation, either between them or towards outsiders. In a bourgeois marriage such harmony would have been ideal, but in a marriage in which one party is a reigning Monarch, and the other – at best – must be looked upon as irresponsible adviser, as a kind of Private Secretary with a husband's rights, such a similarity of views must of necessity lead to a crisis. Herein may be found the seeds of all the future difficulties which from the start embittered Albert's life and brought the Queen so frequently into conflict with her Ministers. True it is that Victoria thought that her Baron 'understands England so fully'; but it may be assumed that this opinion was a kindly error induced by gratitude. Both in his appearance and in his views Stockmar ever remained a German. His many and extensive travels, and numerous sojourns at foreign Courts, did not alter him in any way. A valuable quality perhaps in a diplomat whom many years' activities in foreign countries could not rob of his home views, but a catastrophic fault in a man who, himself a foreigner, is to discuss English questions with English

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Ministers, to advise his English Sovereign as to the interpretation of the English Constitution. Stockmar, therefore, never carried out English politics, because he would never have been able to do so – only Coburg House-politics; the latter, however, with the greatest success.

And the zenith of his success was reached when Albert, tanned and strengthened in body by the Italian sun, his mind crammed full of Stockmarly wisdom, took by storm the Queen who had previously still had some doubts. Saint George, the patron saint not only of England, but also of the ancient family fortress of Coburg, had conquered, without even killing dragons. Now Coburg had really arrived.

But even before the wedding had taken place in the Chapel Royal, St. James's, Albert's difficulties had begun. Stockmar did his best to compromise, to intervene, but without appreciable success. Too much dislike for Coburg had accumulated even before the Coburger arrived; distrust of him was expressed even before he could show who, how, and what he was.

The first difficulties arose when Albert's annuity had to be fixed and granted, and these were increased when Melbourne, in one of his frequent careless moments, made a mistake. Even before the debate in Parliament, Melbourne had said to the Queen that they must expect a defeat. 'When I heard this,' Stockmar wrote in his diary, 'I went to him [Melbourne] and asked him whether he did not consider that the wisest thing to do would be to come to an understanding with the Opposition, and whether he would not authorise me to enter into indirect negotiations on the subject with Wellington and Peel. He answered: "No; my relations to the Duke have of late undergone a change. We are no longer on the footing we were, when you were last here."' Curiously enough, Stockmar allowed himself to be induced by this conversation to give up the idea of entering into such negotiations – although it was his principle that all questions and explanations which related to the interests of



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the Crown should be held as above party feeling, and should be treated confidentially with the Opposition. 'I did not venture,' Stockmar continues, 'at that time, to enter into such a negotiation on my own responsibility; but I have often asked myself since, whether matters would not have gone better, if I had on my account broached the question with Sir Robert Peel.' The painful debate took place, and Albert was granted only £30,000. Leopold had had £50,000.

Just about this time Stockmar suddenly received a letter from Palmerston from which it appeared that in unfriendly quarters doubts were being expressed as to Albert's religion. 'In great haste,' wrote Palmerston, 'can you tell me whether Prince Albert belongs to any Protestant sect, the tenets of which could prevent him from partaking of the Lord's Supper according to the rites of the Church of England?' Thereupon Stockmar answered, in a very decided tone, 'that, in the first place, the Prince did not belong to any sect, and, secondly, that no material difference existed between the celebration of the Lord's Supper according to the rites of the German Protestant Church and those of the Anglican Church. This put an end to these scruples; but God knows, with the fanaticism at present existing, what incredible absurdities might not have been let loose, had not Lord Palmerston been enabled, by my decided answer, at once to make the evil-minded harmless.'

Wellington, who led the attack on Albert, actually moved the House of Lords 'to censure the Ministers for having failed to make a public declaration that the Prince was a Protestant and able to take the Holy Communion in the form prescribed by the Church of England.' The fact was that Melbourne, the Premier, had forgotten to publish the Declaration which Stockmar had given to his Foreign Secretary. Stockmar was not so very far wrong when he gave Melbourne the nickname of 'Poco Curante.'

The greatest difficulties, which it took many years to

surmount, arose when the rank and precedence of the Prince had to be fixed. Wellington was in any case opposed to making an exception in favour of the Prince in settling the precedence. He even made a legal question of it, and declared that it would be an injustice towards the other members of the Royal Family, basing his objections on the cautious plea that it might place the Prince 'in an unpleasant position on the Queen's death.' The King of Hanover, as Duke of Cumberland, joined forces with him, and refused to stand behind 'any paper Royal Highness.' The Dukes of Sussex and Cambridge, however, stated that they would 'accept a position below the Queen's husband.' This disagreeable period, and his efforts to avoid a complete defeat, are described by Stockmar in his diary: 'I had heard from the Tories, that the clause respecting the precedence was certain to be thrown out in the House of Lords. None of my acquaintances whom I could have sent to Wellington or Peel were in town. In my great anxiety I sent my trusted friend Mrs. W. to the Duke of Wellington, to represent to him how deeply this question touched the Queen. He received her, listened to her, scolded a little, and gave an uncertain answer, so that this move produced no result. The Queen had taken the defeat respecting the annuity with great composure, but laid all the greater weight upon the success of the question respecting precedence. When Lord Melbourne informed her of the probability of his being defeated in the Upper House, and therefore proposed that the matter should be dropped, she could not bring herself to follow this advice. I now went to Melbourne and found him doubtful and irresolute. I said to him, "For God's sake withdraw your bill and do not allow yourself to be beaten a second time. This would have the very worst effect possible." He answered, "That I fully believe; but the Queen lays the greatest possible stress upon the matter." I replied, "Be only firm and prove to Her Majesty the evil results that would follow from a second discomfiture." He

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answered, "Yes, but what is to happen next?" "Settle the matter of precedence," I said, "by an order in Council, as the Regent did in the case of Prince Leopold." I went home and copied out for Melbourne the words which the Regent had used in 1826 to settle the rank of Prince Leopold, and sent them to him.' Matters were carried through in accordance with Stockmar's suggestion. Only the Bill of Naturalisation was brought in and passed; a few months later the precedence of the Prince was determined in virtue of the royal prerogative, by a patent, to the effect that the Queen accorded to him precedence next to herself, on all occasions and in all meetings, except where otherwise provided for by Act of Parliament.

It is often forgotten how far from clear was Albert's position, and how hard and unsuccessfully he had to fight for it, because he is known to history, and to grateful remembrance, under the name of 'Prince Consort.' Not until the seventeenth year of the marriage was this title granted to him, and he was only to enjoy it for four years. Until then Albert was officially only the Prince of Saxe-Coburg, or the Husband of the Queen. When at last he received the title which was due to him, *The Times* wrote, 'The new title guaranteed increased homage to its bearer on the banks of the Spree and the Danube, but made no difference in his position anywhere else.' It may probably be assumed to-day that the opinion of *The Times* of those days may be taken to mean that Albert already fully possessed the appreciation and recognition due to his personality, and that his final raising to the rank of Prince Consort was to be looked upon merely as a confirmatory formality.

Now began Stockmar's third sojourn in London, frequently interrupted by lengthy visits to Coburg to his family, but even from there he kept up a continuous correspondence with England. This to all outward appearances completely unfettered position lasted nearly twenty years; he was the confidential friend, with whom everything was

discussed, whose advice was asked in everything. 'All the intellectual gifts,' says Charles Meyer, Albert's librarian, 'knowledge, and convictions which he had inherited or acquired, his long intimacy and intercourse with the House of Coburg, his rich experiences, medical, political, and social, his knowledge of countries, persons, and languages, his sober intellect, his considerate tact, his sprightly humour and quick decision, his upright judgment and warm sympathetic heart—all these qualifications were now of service to him, and were indispensable to him in a position in which he had alternately to sit by a sick-bed or at a writing-table, to give advice for the cradle or the Throne; now to settle a domestic or political difference or attune a discord; now to forward some charitable petition, or aid in putting down some beggar; now to propose some new teacher or governess, or receive the confession of a groom of the chamber; lastly, by cheerful and interesting conversation, to entertain and aid the intellectual growth of the Prince, and afterwards, little by little, of the Royal children.'

A courtier Stockmar was not, and he took life at Court easily. The old gentleman occupied an exceptional position, and could take many liberties; he was not expected to wear the official Court uniform when the Queen dined, and he assuredly would not, with his thin legs, have cut a very happy figure in the official knee-breeches. 'When the Queen had risen from table, and, after holding a circle, had sat down again to tea, Stockmar would generally be seen walking straight through the drawing-room and retiring to his apartment, there to study his own comfort. That he should sacrifice the latter to etiquette, was not expected of him, as for months together he was a guest in the house, and his exceptional position was so well recognised, that these deviations from courtly usage did not give offence, even in public.' When Stockmar had retired to his rooms in the Palace, Albert would come to him, 'his arms full of papers and despatch-boxes, with the cheerful impetuosity

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peculiar to him, and throw himself upon the sofa, to rest, whilst the old friend listened wistfully at first to his questions and reports, and then would himself, whilst walking up and down the room, take to recounting, in sparkling fulness, a mass of experiences, anecdotes, and remarks, principally out of his own life.'

'When the spring came,' the report continues, 'Stockmar suddenly disappeared. He hated taking leave, and his room would some fine morning be found empty. Then letters would follow him to Coburg, complaining of his faithlessness, and the summer generally brought requests that he would soon return.'

To-day all this reads very pleasantly, but at the time it was read very differently, and people did not at all approve of Stockmar's presence and influence. All those who came in touch with him gradually changed their opinion of him — with the sole exception of the Coburgers. Palmerston at first saw in him 'the most disinterested man he had ever encountered,' and considers him 'one of the best political heads he had ever met with'; but later he turned strongly against 'the employment of German physicians in political functions about a Constitutional Court.' Melbourne, more accessible and easier to get on with than Palmerston, was of the opinion that 'Stockmar is an excellent and most valuable man, with one of the soundest and coolest judgments that Lord M. has ever met with'; and, on another occasion, 'An excellent man; he has rather a contempt of human affairs and means; a bad digestion.' Melbourne regrets much that Stockmar's health was not very good, and in his characteristic style, so full of imagery, utters the diagnosis that the main fault lay with his 'stomach, which is in fact the seat of health, strength, thought, and life. Lord M. sees that a great physician says that Napoleon lost the battle of Leipzig in consequence of some very greasy soup which he ate the day before and which clouded his judgment and obscured his perceptions.' What historical

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glimpses! What possibilities open out if in the history of the world gastronomic art and strategic science had always gone hand in hand! But even Melbourne, who here expresses such a kind personal interest in Stockmar, said, in reference to the Coburgers, 'I dislike very much to hear it said by my friends that I am influenced by them. We know it is not true, but still I dislike to hear it said.' It was not Stockmar's personality, whose honesty stood above all doubt, which caused the dislike for him to increase. His irresponsible activities, his immunity under august patronage, were bound to raise the opposition of all those who bore a personal responsibility for the affairs of the State. Suspicions were expressed that 'the German Baron' exercised 'a mysterious anti-national influence behind the Throne.' Feeling against him became so strong that the Whig Speaker, Abercromby, afterwards Lord Dunfermline, threatened to bring the matter before Parliament. Stockmar was, like Mephistopheles, 'the spirit who always denies.' But the latter 'desired evil, but always brought forth good.' Stockmar, who only desired good, brought forth, in an absolutely tragic manner, only evil. He assisted the Coburgers to come to England, but he was not of much assistance to them once they were in England. Albert, by himself, standing on his own feet, might perhaps have achieved the mystical transubstantiation into the soul of England. Heavily laden with Stockmar's rationalism and lack of imagination, the miracle could not come to pass. Ernest also, his brother, in whom the light-hearted vein of the Coburgers was especially strongly developed, but who knew more of the world than Albert, recognised soon how difficult it was for the Consort to fit himself into English conditions and to enter into the English mentality: '... many peculiarities of Society were from the first more congenial to me than they ever became to my brother. The love of the Nobility for every kind of sport found much more response and understanding from me than from him, and in this way

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it was possible for me to obtain access to the otherwise too reserved English character. Whether in his intercourse with that nation Albert was able from the start to find the right note it is not for me to judge. It is a subject on which I often squabbled with him in all affection.' This Prince from a foreign country could never feel at home in England, never become really English. In spite of this, however, Albert curiously had something 'Victorian' in him, and actually might have been taken for a pronounced Victorian. Of the Coburgers, who almost all had an optimistic and lighter outlook on life, he had nothing in him. He was a man kept down by a deep pessimism, and was towards the end of his life completely resigned: 'I go on working at my treadmill, as life seems to me.'

Stockmar had undertaken – and in undertaking the task he had incurred an obligation, at least a moral obligation – to show to these two young people, on the Throne and by the side of the Throne, the road, to level it for them. He made the attempt with unsuitable means, and the Throne was not 'sheltered within an inner and landlocked haven.' For the tragic failure the irresponsible man must bear the responsibility.

Severe judgments have been passed on him; he has been said to be an intriguer and that he 'did as much harm in his day as any political wire-puller that ever lived.' That such judgments were passed on him at the time can be understood; but to-day they must, like the attacks on Albert, be taken to be exaggerated. To Bunsen, the Prussian Ambassador, Stockmar once remarked, 'Much understanding is required to be an honest man in public affairs – understanding is necessary for a man to know whether he actually is honest or not; a man may wind round and round in a labyrinth of action for twenty-five years, supposing himself to be honest; and not to be so at last.' Almost twice as long as the example here chosen by him did Stockmar stand in more or less public service, and was always honest and

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decent, neither an intriguer nor a wire-puller. His failure – one is inclined to say his tragic failure – was inevitable; he judged the world and men from an un-English – therefore in his position a false – perspective. Therefore his political view-point was wrong – was bound to be wrong. His many and lengthy compositions form the most valuable scientific material, and are of the greatest interest to the historian and the specialist in Constitutional law. In practice, however, they were useless, and in the hands of his youthful and inexperienced principals directly dangerous. That the latter identified themselves with Stockmar's ideas, tried to use them in practice – that is the tragedy for all parties. Stockmar was the right man, but in the wrong place.<sup>1</sup>

The wave of distrust against Albert also rose too high. He was blamed for faults that were not his. When, during the Crimean War, the reports from the front were quite different from what the nation thought it was entitled to expect, 'the popular indignation redoubled, and burst in its fullest fury on the head of Prince Albert and the Queen.' Albert was accused of being the head of an Austro-Belgian-Coburg-Orleans clique. Overwhelmed with sorrow, he wrote to his brother, 'It is pretended that I whisper [the Tsar's orders] in Victoria's ear, she gets round old Aberdeen, and the voice of the only English Minister, Palmerston, is not listened to – nay, he is always intrigued against, at the Court and by the Court.' Even people who at other times had a perfectly clear judgment, and in no way belonged to the politically excitable groups, said quite seriously that Albert should be sentenced for high treason – be committed to the Tower; even the name of the Queen herself was mentioned in this connection. 'People surrounded the Tower by thousands to see us brought to it!' Albert wrote with tragic irony, when he learnt that a sensation-loving crowd had actually waited for hours in front of the Tower. The rumours about Albert had taken such shape that an eye-and

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix 3.



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ear-witness at the Tower heard a man of good standing, who was waiting for the 'delivery' of the Prince, say, 'Poor young man; we hope he may not be executed.' When Palmerston resigned, for quite different reasons, after the Crimean War, it was generally believed that the Prime Minister had fallen because he proposed vigorous measures 'against Russia and could not prevail against the influence of the Prince.' Once again Stockmar, 'the cunning friend of Russia, is in assiduous attendance upon the Prince,' and he was made responsible.

No doubt these were exaggerations. But *de nihilo nihil* – out of nothing nothing comes. The parties interested, the whole Coburg circle, a kind of limited company, are themselves to blame if events were judged in an exaggerated way. Albert suggests, 'We must organise a chain of couriers between Coburg, Brussels, and London, so that our letters may go quickly, often, and safely.' This limited company which dealt unlimitedly with everything – ecclesiastical and religious questions, matters of education and morals – approves of Albert's refusal of the office of commander-in-chief. All this, however, would not have been decisive, would have been harmless enough. But this company also discusses the functions of the Sovereign, Ministerial responsibilities, draws up lengthy memoranda which, after everyone has done his full share, do not in any way betray their original paternity, and passes them on to the responsible parties so that the latter may profit by the infallible counsels. Was it not obvious that the belief must arise that a second irresponsible Government had been formed? Palmerston was the Minister who more than any other refused to take notice of them, who decisively repelled every attempt at influence. In repulsing the Coburgers he caused the Queen 'many mortifying experiences.' The Queen's foreign correspondence was of course submitted to Palmerston, and thus also the correspondence with the Queen of Portugal, Maria da Gloria, who under Stockmar's

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auspices had married Ferdinand of Saxe-Coburg. In Portugal things did not look any too happy, and the youthful royal couple had to fight hard for the existence of the Throne. Maria, not only related to Victoria, but from their earliest youth a close friend, turned to her for protection. Palmerston was consulted, but described the difficulties as a 'purely Coburg family matter.' He said that a certain Dietz, a Coburger by birth and sent to Portugal by Leopold, was, with his absolutist views, the cause of all the difficulties. The only way of helping the Portuguese Throne was immediately to dismiss Dietz, who occupied in Lisbon a position similar to that of Stockmar. Such counsel, as well as the reason on which it was based, was bound to hurt the Queen as well as the Coburg family, and they gave vent to their feelings by describing Palmerston as 'ill-tempered, coarse, and threatening.' The latter, however, insisted that Victoria should with her own hand write a letter to Lisbon from his draft, in which Constitutional advice was given as well as warning against Dietz the adviser. Melbourne took 'the Coburg clique,' as it was often called, more easily; in his view it consisted of 'very good and intelligent people.' Assuredly none of its members had anything of the conspirator in his composition. But the clique existed, it dealt in politics, and its spiritual head was Stockmar.

Two European ideals were followed by Stockmar in his foreign policy during his whole life: the union of Germany under the leadership of Prussia, which did come to pass a few decades later, and close friendly relations between England and Prussia-Germany, which did not develop quite as Stockmar would have wished. Stockmar had studied most thoroughly and most carefully English home politics and English conditions, both as to the past and as to the present, from his own experience. Again and again he pointed out that the Monarch must, as far as possible, keep outside all Party politics. And at the same time he saw to it that those whom he advised should not concern

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themselves too much with political details. Everyone who has studied the English Constitution will admit that Stockmar was right in saying that the Sovereign is no 'nodding Mandarin,' but he dreamt of a kind of personal union between Monarch and Premier. The Monarch, he wrote from Coburg,<sup>1</sup> is the Permanent Premier, the Permanent President of the Ministerial Council. These views can no more be brought into accord with the Constitution than could the individual who propounded them. Stockmar did not benefit his Royal pupils by again drawing their attention to his dogmas. Again and again he laid stress on his opinion that 'the omnipotence of the House of Commons is revolution itself, and death to the true old English Constitution,' and that Foreign Affairs should really not be subject to the control of Parliament; the latter he thought to be in quite a particular measure 'the special concerns of Royal and Imperial minds.' Palmerston had, and as Minister responsible to Parliament was bound to have, different views.

On the other hand, the memorandum drawn up by Stockmar was not altogether unjustified: 'The least the Queen has a right to require of her Minister is:

- '1. That he will distinctly state what he proposes in a given case, in order that the Queen may know as distinctly to what she has to give her Royal sanction;
- '2. Having given once her sanction to a measure, the Minister who, in the execution of such measure, alters or modifies it arbitrarily, commits an act of dishonesty towards the Crown which the Queen has an undoubted constitutional right to visit with the dismissal of that Minister.'

<sup>1</sup> This letter, which Stockmar sent to Albert nine years before his death, may be looked upon as his Political Testament. It is interesting for many reasons, as it gives the greatest insight into his mentality and into his way of expressing his thoughts. He also shows how frankly without flattery, without fine phrases, he addressed the Prince. The letter is 3,800 words long. 'I had no time to be brief,' he for once excuses his prolixity. (In quoting 'I had no time to be brief' Stockmar probably had in mind Pascal's remark about a letter: 'Je n'ai pas eu le loisir de la faire plus courte.')'

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Palmerston had only too often been guilty of grave carelessness in this direction. But from the purely human point of view it can easily be understood that he rebelled against the objections and queries to which he was constantly exposed on the part of the Palace. Palmerston had held office in Spencer Perceval's Ministry ten years before the Queen was born, and now his despatches were to be corrected by a young lady of little experience. And he knew – and this must have been especially painful to him – that it was not even the Sovereign who criticised him, but that behind the throne stood Albert and Stockmar. Actually the instructions he received from the Palace were often copied from memoranda made by Stockmar. After Palmerston's resignation the Queen requested Russell to draw up a formula from which could be seen the general principles according to which England would settle the policy which it would follow towards each separate country. Such a plan could only have come from Stockmar's mind. He and Albert were too strong on theories. Assuredly 'a fact is a great thing,' but neither knew – or they had forgotten during the course of years – that there are imponderabilia which are sometimes of even greater importance than facts.

Stockmar occupied such an intimate position at the Court, his influence extended to such confidential matters, that it is surprising that a foreigner could carry on such activities for three decades without any serious conflicts. That the Ministers did not protest most vehemently can only be due to the fact that they were convinced of the good intentions of this foreigner, who was prepared to take on himself the greatest difficulties if he thought that by so doing he could protect the Queen or Albert from unpleasant consequences. The delicate little doctor grows beyond his stature when, like a Knight of the Middle Ages, he places himself in front of his Lady and Sovereign – who is not even his Sovereign, and does not and may not know that he fights for her with

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his pen. After Melbourne's resignation it was, to say the least of it, careless of Victoria to continue corresponding with him on political subjects; neither the objections of Albert nor those of Stockmar could convince her that this was a dangerous game, which might even be looked upon as a lasting unconstitutional action. Melbourne once even forgot himself so far as to write that now was the opportunity for the Queen to deliver herself of Peel; how this could be achieved he would explain to her verbally. It is entirely irrelevant, for the purpose of arriving at an estimate of Stockmar, to say that, as official history assumes, he 'misunderstood the character of the correspondence, and overestimated its momentousness.' He had come to the conclusion that the young Queen was on a wrong road, and intervened: 'As long as the secret communication between H.M. and Lord Melbourne continues, this ground, upon which alone Sir Robert could obtain the position necessary to him as Premier, must remain cut away from under his feet. I hold, therefore, this secret interchange an essential injustice to Sir Robert's present situation. . . . In this particular matter nobody has paramount power to do right or wrong but the Queen, and more especially Lord M. himself. . . . If I was standing in his shoes I would show the Queen, of my own accord, and upon constitutional grounds too, that a continued correspondence of that sort must be fraught with imminent danger to the Queen, especially to Lord M., and to the State.' In any case, continued Stockmar, Melbourne's intended visit, to which the Queen had already consented, must not be allowed to take place. Meanwhile Melbourne himself had probably had doubts as to whether it would be quite correct for him to turn up at Windsor, for, by accident or intention, he did not return in his next letter to the request of the Queen, but had applied to Albert 'in order to learn first the Prince's opinion on the feasibility of the matter.' On no pretext, decides Stockmar, must the Prince be dragged into this

unpleasant affair. 'I think it wrong to call upon the Prince to give an opinion on the subject, as he has not the means to cause his opinions to be either regarded or complied with.' A most interesting glimpse behind the scenes Stockmar gives us here: Melbourne had asked for Albert's opinion, and therefore would probably have acted unquestionably on his decision. There thus remains only the Queen, who might possibly insist on her command being obeyed, and in that event Albert would have no means of ensuring that his advice should be followed. Only twenty months had at this time elapsed since the marriage of Victoria and Albert; time works great changes, and five years later Stockmar need not have worried on such a matter. Anson, who at the time was Albert's Private Secretary (the next part of this book deals with him), was particularly well suited to get rid of this episode in a personal conversation with Melbourne, whose Private Secretary he had formerly been. Anson's position was not an easy one; Melbourne swore, as he so often did: 'God eternally d—n it. Flesh and blood cannot stand this. . . . I cannot be expected to give up my position in the country, neither do I think that it is the Queen's interest that I should.' He could not decide to give up correspondence with the Queen, but he promised 'he should distinctly advise the Queen to adhere to her Ministers in everything, unless the time had arrived at which it might be resisted.' Such shilly-shallying was opposed to the whole position which Stockmar had taken up: 'If he wishes to carry this out consistently and quite honestly, what then is the value of his advice if it be only the copy of that of Sir Robert Peel? This means, in my way of reading it: The Queen, by her correspondence with me, puts Peel into my hands, and there I mean to let him stay unhurt, until time and extraneous circumstances – but more especially the advantage that will accrue to me by my secret correspondence with the Queen – shall enable me to plunge, in all security, the dagger into

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his back.' Nor did a personal discussion between Stockmar himself and Melbourne lead to a settlement. The best thing for all parties, advised Stockmar, would be to await the pending return of the Queen, and then 'state of your own accord to Her Majesty that this secret and confidential correspondence with her must cease.' The heir-apparent was born, and – the correspondence went on. For the statement that after Melbourne's death the Queen asked for her letters to be returned, but received only part, Greville must be left responsible.

Stockmar, the Coburg-English House Politician, that 'Enquire Within Upon Everything' which knew the answer to every question, and 'understood England so very well,' was also an authority on the German question. Buelow and Bunsen, the Envoys, although they knew that he was the confidential friend of the English Court, kept him fully informed as to events and the development of affairs in Prussia-Germany, and Stockmar was not at all the man to keep his views to himself or to withhold his advice. If he had had his way, he would not only have recast the English Constitution; he would also, twenty years before Bismarck, have founded the German Empire. For a time he even took an active part in German politics, when he represented his native Coburg in the National Assembly at Frankfort-on-Main. Bunsen, who had been cast in the private political performances of Coburg-Windsor for only a minor rôle (he did not seem even to notice that he had been cast for any rôle at all), introduced his friend to his chief, Usedom, the Prussian Foreign Minister, as 'the disciple of Stein, preceptor of Prince Albert, the friend and private adviser of the King of the Belgians, finally the confidential friend both of Lord Melbourne and of Sir Robert Peel,' and described him as 'one of the first politicians of Germany and Europe.' Did Bunsen likewise say this to his chief personally, *viva voce*? Doubtful, very. 'Thou mayest be more prodigal of praise when thou writest a

letter than when thou speakest in presence.' The same Stockmar, who was considered by many in England as the greatest living English politician, is here described as one of the greatest German – yea, even European – politicians. Were any greater heights left? The *præceptor Alberti* imagined himself on the road to becoming, by way of *præceptor Germaniæ, præceptor mundi*. The unpretentious, diligent little doctor must have possessed a great deal of fascination. In the Empire to be – which, however, did not at that time come into being – he was even offered the post of Minister of Foreign Affairs. 'Anyone who at sixty years of age, with gout in the stomach, undertook the place of sick-nurse to Germany in her infectious fever, must be simply mad.' It was only ill-health, then, which was the cause of his refusal. Bismarck, who enjoyed better health, accepted the post twelve years later. In Parliament, Stockmar met delegates, Ministers, and also Frederick William IV, King of Prussia, whom Treitschke had called 'the greatest of those gifted dilettanti who abound so much in modern civilisation.' Like the Queen of Portugal, Frederick William had also, when he suffered Constitutional pains, turned to Victoria for advice. He tried to be quite particularly clever, and caused the letter to be handed to the Queen in the absence of Ministers; but Bunsen, better acquainted with English conditions than his master, and also cleverer, informed Albert of its contents. Palmerston, to whom the letter was submitted, pointed out that it was irregular for the English Queen to correspond with foreign Monarchs unless they were her relatives, and together with Albert drew up a colourless reply. That same Frederick William enjoyed the very highest personal consideration at the English Court, for he had tactfully informed not only the Queen, but also the Prince, officially of his accession to the Throne. Victoria very specially appreciated such attentions to her husband, who was not even yet fully recognised, and still had to fight for his position. Stockmar sensed some new possibility,



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and at his instigation the Prussian King was invited to the christening of the heir to the Throne.

Frederick William had always had great sympathy for England, and Bunsen had strengthened this sentiment. He felt much honoured by the invitation, as perhaps insignificant little relatives feel flattered when on some special occasion the great wealthy cousin remembers them and calls them in. Peel assuredly was no Germanophobe, and, as a good Christian, he was quite after the heart of the King. Aberdeen he liked because the latter also had a certain sympathy for Metternich. Thus the ground was prepared for the visit, the frame of mind seemed favourable, and in spite of opposing counsels, which were not lacking on the part of the Tsar Nicholas, the King of Prussia came to Windsor. As christening present the crowned romantic brought a shield, designed by the Pre-Raphaelite painter Peter Cornelius, on which St. George was allegorically exalted. Louis Philippe had sent a child's gun. It was in reference to this child that Stockmar had said, 'a man's education begins the first day of his life,' a thesis which may cause much dispute. But it is certain that in this Royal nursery the fight for the sympathies of the future man began very early. It may be assumed that the growing little fellow in coming years demanded the French toy more often than the German shield of faith.

Victoria personally invested her guest with the Order of the Garter, and toasts were exchanged to the two leading Powers of Protestantism. If matters had been left here, the visit might have been a success. But the guest tried to avail himself of the opportunity of making propaganda for his confused and adventurous ideas. He was listened to with surprise, and received polite but cool replies. Stockmar, who assuredly was well disciplined and could put up with much, had great difficulty in concealing his fright when Frederick William suddenly expressed the view that Belgium (Prussia also had recognised and guaranteed the neutrality

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of that country twelve years previously) ought to join the German Alliance. Really the Hohenzollerns have been unlucky in their Belgian dealings. The English Press, which at that time was not so well disciplined as it is to-day, called the Royal guest a fool, a hypocrite, a spy; and, in the House of Lords, Brougham advised Frederick William to employ his stay in England in learning how to rule a country, adding that he ought at last to give his country the Constitution which his father had promised. Thus the visit brought about by Stockmar ended in a sad failure.

With the brother of the King, Prince William, subsequently the first German Emperor, Stockmar also had connections. Friendly relations between the Prince's Court, at that time in Coblenz, and the English Court had been established during, and as the result of, the stay of the Prince in England; at the March Revolution William had been compelled to leave his country and had found a sympathetic asylum in London. Gradually, even then, first the thought, then the wish ripened, that the friendly relations might become closer, and, as the youthful principal actors were entirely of the same opinion, the marriage of the Princess Royal and the Prussian Prince, subsequently Crown Prince, took place.<sup>1</sup>

Of all the Royal children, little Vic was Stockmar's especial favourite, and 'he had the very highest possible opinion of her.' The Liberal views which, as Crown Princess, and in spite of all opposition, she tried to carry through at the Prussian Court but with so little success, her mental and spiritual Liberalism, are the inheritance which she received from her father, from Stockmar, and from Bunsen. Stockmar had written of her, 'From her earliest girlhood, I have loved her, have expected great things of her, and have striven to be of use to her. I hold her to be exceptionally gifted, in many things almost inspired.' This was the last Royal marriage with which Stockmar was called upon to occupy himself.

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix 4.

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His life's task – the service of the House of Coburg – found in this event in some way its crowning point. Stockmar's eldest son, Ernest, was called in to take up at the Court of the young couple a position of trust, so as to serve as a kind of liaison officer between Windsor and Potsdam. Did the Coburgers intend to appoint the Stockmars in permanence?

When Queen Victoria and Prince Albert visited the newly married daughter, Stockmar came from Coburg to Potsdam and drove almost daily to Babelsberg, which had been placed at the disposal of the Royal parents by the Prussian Court. 'To the Government and Court circles Stockmar's presence was uncanny. Hardly anyone belonging to these circles was closely acquainted with him, or knew who and what he was. All they were cognisant of was, that he was somehow connected with the Coburg, Belgian, and English Courts; had influence and confidence there; and that he was a decided Liberal. Most people have an irresistible tendency, when something in a fellow-mortal remains obscure to them, to seek an explanation by presupposing something bad. Hence Stockmar was an English spy, a Belgian intriguer, or a Coburg agent; at all events, a man seeking secret, dangerous, perhaps revolutionary, objects.' When Stockmar on one occasion went over a bridge with an acquaintance, the latter was asked by a high official with whom it was that he crossed the bridge, to which he replied that it was Stockmar. 'Ah!' exclaimed the high official, 'why did you not pitch him into the river?' It does seem in truth that Stockmar could associate only with Princes; all other circles in time came to look on him with mistrust. In Potsdam he also, sixteen years after the unlucky christening visit to Windsor, met again King Frederick William, whose mental derangement was by then far advanced. Attempts were made to explain to the King that Stockmar stood before him. *King*: 'Who is that? I don't know him. Have never seen him.' *Queen*: 'He is the man you have always liked so much, who was so good to Bunsen in England.' The name is

written and spelt. *King*: 'No, I cannot recollect ever having known him. Ah! – my poor head – my memory is quite gone!' Whether it was intentional or due to forgetfulness that the Queen did not remind the King of Stockmar in connection with the visit to Windsor cannot be ascertained.

But the diligent doctor's activities were by no means confined to influencing England's home politics and trying to conduct its foreign policy, to acting as political Cupid in arranging marriages, and to working for the birth of the German Empire. To assume this would be considerably to underestimate his industry. He developed more and more into Albert's Figaro; from all sides he was called, asked for. Stockmar here, Stockmar there. 'All are desiring me, ever requiring me, paupers and patrons, maidens and matrons.' And in the end he believed himself that not until he put his hand to it – 'room for the castle's factotum here' – could anything be carried through successfully. But there was one great difference – this Figaro's master was no Almaviva, and Albert had desires which went into quite another direction. Thus the young gentleman wanted, immediately he had taken office, to reform the Royal household. Stockmar had to inspect, investigate, inquire, see the Lord Chamberlain and the porters, the Master of the Horse and the footmen: '... One should think that the simplest and best mode would have been to have placed the whole building under the charge of one department. But not only is it placed under three departments, but it is quite undecided what parts of the palace are under the charge of the Lord Chamberlain, and which under the Lord Steward. . . . In the present reign, the Lord Steward has surrendered to the Lord Chamberlain the grand hall and other rooms on the ground floor; but whether the kitchen, sculleries, pantries, remain under his charge, *quoad the rooms*, is a question to which no one could perhaps at this moment reply. The outside of the palace is, however, considered to belong to the Woods and Forests; so that, as the inside cleaning of the windows belongs

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to the Lord Chamberlain's department, the degree of light to be admitted into the palace depends on the well-timed and good understanding between the Lord Chamberlain's Office and that of the Woods and Forests. . . . The Lord Steward, for example, finds the fuel and lays the fire, and the Lord Chamberlain lights it. It was upon this state of things that the writer of this paper, having been sent one day by Her present Majesty to Sir Frederick Watson, then the Master of the Household, to complain that the dining-room was always cold, was gravely answered, "You see, properly speaking, it is not our fault; for the Lord Steward lays the fire only, and the Lord Chamberlain lights it." It frequently happens at Windsor that some of the visitors are at a loss to find the drawing-room, and at night, if they happen to forget the right entrance from the corridors, they wander for an hour helpless and unassisted.'

It may be left open whether these opinions did not go far beyond their object. Even before the era of Stockmar host and guests felt at home at the Court of St. James's, and assuredly the windows were occasionally cleaned; by whom is relatively unimportant. The maxim that *minima non curat prætor* could not be observed by Stockmar, if only for the reason that he was no prætor but only a præceptor whose priggishness had to attend to everything. His mania for making himself felt led him into affairs of which he understood nothing, where he might have done enormous damage and did in fact do much. Documents, grown-up Princes, and experienced Ministers are after all able to offer resistance, and badly treated window-panes can be replaced. The souls of children are more sensitive, and the impressions they receive last a lifetime. The darkest chapter in Stockmar's manifold activities is that relating to the education of the Royal children.

The remembrance of his youth was always rather painful to Edward VII, and of all the disagreeable impressions of his childhood the most unpleasant was that of Stockmar. As

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a grown-up man the King was able, on looking back, to explain for himself, and to understand, much that had appeared and was bound to appear incomprehensible to the child, but Stockmar he could never understand. And, indeed, it appears even to-day hardly comprehensible how the Royal parents could entrust the nursery and the later education to this man who lacked every quality necessary to a sensitive and understanding teacher. Dean Swift's saying, that 'Education is generally the worse in proportion to the wealth and grandeur of the parents,' has here a remarkable and unique confirmation. Stockmar, the man of detail, overlooked nothing, and the selection of Mrs. Lilly, the nurse, who soon became a well-known figure owing to verses and cartoons, occupies him just as much as did later, we will say, the appointment of a scientific tutor. 'The nursery gives me more trouble than the government of a Kingdom would do.' Perhaps he would have achieved more if he had taken less trouble. 'Rigid in his standards of discipline, stern in rebuke of childish faults, overflowing in cautious counsel, the Baron watched the young Prince's physical and intellectual development with a disconcerting seriousness.' This, then, was the man who was to supervise the education of the future King of England. Under the system the boy was 'deprived of the companionship of boys of his own age,' and there was absolutely no question of liberty in any shape or form. Albert-Stockmar had thought out, and worked out, a system of education which may be described without the slightest exaggeration as 'solitary confinement of the boy.' It was a part of this system that the lad had constantly to write letters to relatives and acquaintances. When he gave Stockmar at Coburg an account of his impressions of the Great Exhibition, and mentioned that 'some waxwork models of the murderous thugs of India' had particularly interested him, this pedant was actually capable of replying, 'He is born in a Christian and enlightened age in which atrocious acts are not even dreamt of.' Edward was, at the

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time, ten years of age! Melbourne had much more sensible views. 'Be not over-solicitous about education. It may be able to do much, but it does not so much as is expected from it,' he wrote to Albert when he had seen this kind of education.

'Within the walls of Buckingham Palace or Windsor Castle letters and notes constantly passed and have been carefully and elaborately preserved.' Albert's and Stockmar's unpleasant habit of writing memoranda on every possible subject and on every possible occasion now took absolutely grotesque forms as regards both the number and the length of these documents; as their subject is the education of the child, they have a repellent and painful effect. One of these 'papers of instruction' runs into approximately two thousand words and is correspondingly boring. They 'laid down in precise detail the daily tasks. It is no exaggeration to say that every hour of the Prince of Wales's time was mapped out by his governors and submitted for approval.' As a birthday present the young gentleman frequently received among the gifts another memorandum.

We may agree with Albert's saying, 'Upon the good education of Princes, and especially of those who are destined to govern, the welfare of the world in these days greatly depends,' just as much as with Stockmar's demand that the boy should be taught 'pure and comprehensive Christian morality.' But the carrying into practice of any idea, however sound, and even if the idea was their own, became in the hands of these two theoretical thinkers a matter of pedantry and a failure.

The lad of course suffered under this unreasonable régime, although it had its origin in the very best intentions, and, when things became unbearable for him, he was obstructive. At first he was unable to satisfy the demands made upon him, and later he refused. Of set purpose he was what is called 'disobedient'; he offered passive resistance. Everyone at Court saw the mistakes which were being made, with

the exception of Victoria, Albert, and Stockmar. 'The best Englishman is the best man of the country, not the one who has learned other people's ideas of what an Englishman should be.' . . . 'The tragedy of Edward VII' had begun; it was to continue, in conjunction with other material for conflict, through his life, into his seventh decade.

The young Prince was to keep a diary, and the father much resented that the son neither would nor could keep it in the same manner as young Vic, his sister; but the latter also will one day rebel against this compulsion. Edward's dislike to reading books dates back to this period, and is due to the fallible method of the infallible Stockmar. Never until his twentieth year was the lad allowed to choose his own reading. 'Every book came before him as a task,' and thus his pleasure in reading books was spoilt. He never got over this, and as King was looked upon as the best-informed man, who knew everything – except what was written in books.<sup>1</sup> At the age of seventeen he was charged not only with 'want of enthusiasm,' but also with 'want of generosity.' How false is this opinion, what a lack of insight, and how greatly contradicted by events. Not because he was educated under the ægis of Stockmar, but in spite of this, he became a great man; true it is, not quite as the Queen wished – 'that he may become the image of his beloved father' – and perhaps for this very reason a great King.

There is only one possibility, one point, from which this 'dehumanised education,' which only a well-disposed and normal boy could bear without lasting question, may be explained – the fear of the ancestors; and fear is never a good leader, and especially not in matters of education. 'Happy is he who of his ancestors ever with joy keepeth the memory fresh' is a saying which the young Prince could hardly apply

<sup>1</sup> In acknowledging the receipt of books presented or dedicated to him, he always stated that he was 'looking forward to reading' same; or 'I shall certainly read it with the greatest interest,' which does not mean that he did in fact read them subsequently. (Edward's answer reminds us of Disraeli's remark when a book was sent to him: 'I shall lose no time in reading it.')



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to himself. The spectre of his ancestors was kept continually before the eyes of his parents by their adviser, and in particular that of George IV, who, according to Stockmar, would never have become what he was if his father, George III, had not neglected sound principles in the education of his son. Albert's father, Ernest, likewise was nothing to be proud of, especially after Pauline Panam had exposed this remarkable gentleman in the most unpleasant manner before the whole of Europe. Stockmar believed that education can achieve everything, but after all it is only second to nature.

At the age of nineteen the young Prince went to Germany and Coburg; with the most disagreeable recollections he visited, or was compelled to visit, Stockmar, now retired. 'I visited the Baron after breakfast and found him looking very well, wonderfully so as he has not left his room for five months. He seemed pleased to see me and to receive your letters.' Anyway, 'he seemed pleased.' In a long letter which the Prince brought back Stockmar rejoiced over 'the many signs of improvement' which he had observed 'in the young gentleman.' To which the father replied that 'it is a great joy and comfort to us' to hear this. . . . It seems hardly possible to exchange drier, more pedantic words, which even to-day affect the ear unpleasantly. It was not just an ordinary pupil who had visited his old former master; it was the Prince of Wales who had shown a courtesy to the former Private Secretary of his father. It is in truth Stockmar, the sinister pedagogue, the eternal critic, who should be charged with lack of generosity and enthusiasm in this case. The critical faculty, in opposition to the creative faculty, was so strongly developed in him that he saw exactly every fault – except his own – and could very quickly judge its effect. Thus he expressed to Clarendon his most earnest concern that the Royal children were being brought up too strictly, and were treated, especially by the Queen, as too dependent upon her. And it was, of course, quite impossible to contradict the Queen. The young Princess, then recently

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married to Prince Frederick, was being treated by her as if she were still in the nursery at Osborne or Balmoral. Everything possible and impossible was being asked of 'this poor child'; she was expected to send continually the most exhaustive accounts from Berlin, and she was being accused of 'forgetting what is due to her own family and country.' He said that the young wife was 'worried and frightened to death,' and 'unless a stop can be put, I know not what might be the consequences, for she [the Princess] is not in good health.' Stockmar wanted, so he told Clarendon, immediately to write to the Queen 'in a style to which she was little accustomed, and such a letter as she probably had never had in her life before.' Clarendon himself ought, on his return, to speak with the Prince in England. When Clarendon came to London, he was at once requested by Albert to come to Windsor, and was there asked to speak to him quite openly about matters, but he must in no case mention the subject to the Queen.

Stockmar had been living in Coburg for three years when the Prince of Wales visited him; after a life full of labour he had well deserved his rest. A few weeks before his final departure from England, he wrote from Windsor to King Leopold: ' . . . More than twenty years ago, I returned to England to be of service to the Princess Victoria, now the Queen. This year I shall be seventy; and I feel I am no longer either mentally or physically equal to the laborious and exhausting work of paternal friend and trusted confessor. I must take leave, and this time for ever. Such is the law of nature; and well it is for me that I can do so with the clearest conscience; for I have worked as long as my strength availed me, and for no unworthy objects. This consciousness is the only reward which I desired to earn; and my beloved master and friend, of his own free will and from the bottom of his heart, and with a thorough knowledge of all the matters and persons here, gladly bears witness to the fact that I have earned that reward.'

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Slowly the old man neared his end. He had been once more in Berlin, had there seen the Queen and the Prince Consort who, to his great joy, in their old affection visited him two years later in Coburg.<sup>1</sup>

One great sorrow still lay in wait for the veteran – the loss of his greatest hope. With the untimely death of Prince Albert the whole aim and object of Stockmar's life was destroyed. His feeling was that of a man who sees at one blow the work of an entire life undone. 'I feel right well that I cannot judge this matter as one in full possession of his senses; for the thought of the malignity of my personal fate, which has allowed me to live so long that I should endure this cruel blow, drives me at times half mad. An edifice which, for a great and noble purpose, had been reared, with a devout sense of duty, by twenty years of laborious toil, has been shattered to its very foundations.' Once more he had the sad joy of being allowed to greet the Queen in Coburg. The broken-hearted widow, for whom Fate had another forty years of fruitful reign in store, wept with the aged man 'over the loss that had fallen upon them. When she showed him on her table the portraits and photographs of the beloved Prince, Stockmar broke forth, as she herself relates in the *Early Years*, in the following words: "My dear good Prince! how happy I shall be to see him again! and it will not be long." ' The old doctor was too pessimistic, had made a wrong diagnosis; his vitality was greater than he thought. Dying was not such a quick matter; he survived his Prince by eighteen months.

'Even indispensable people pass away. This man's death is felt by distant Kings and Queens in this solemn and consecrated hour, as if they had been the only ones who possessed, who loved, and who now have lost the departed.' These were the words of the Coburg pastor at the family grave. Grateful love erected here a memorial, designed by

<sup>1</sup> On this occasion the Queen saw for the first time her not quite two-year-old first grandson, the subsequent Emperor William II.

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the Crown Princess of Prussia, 'to the memory of Baron Christian Friedrich von Stockmar. Dedicated by his friends in the reigning families of Belgium, Coburg, England, and Prussia.'

The Queen's grief was deep; her 'dearest, wisest, best, and oldest friend' she calls the departed, and remembers that Albert 'again and again longed for Stockmar.' In her sorrow she even goes so far as to believe that 'both my Angel's and dear Stockmar's lives would have been prolonged if the latter had continued his visits to England regularly. . . . Now they are together.' For many years she often thinks of her 'dear old Baron,' and in the *Early Years* she dedicates to him a memorial: 'The Queen, looking back with gratitude and affection to the friend of their married life, can never forget the assistance given by the Baron to the young couple in regulating their movements and general mode of life, and in directing the education of their children.' But in her personal affectionate gratitude the august lady was mistaken when she thought that 'the name of the Baron will live long, indeed, as a household word in the English palace.' Stockmar was more quickly forgotten. The editors<sup>1</sup> of the first series of *The Letters of Queen Victoria* give the following opinion about Stockmar and his political influence: 'He certainly deserved the devoted confidence reposed in him by Prince Albert and the Queen; it may perhaps be questioned whether his own doctrinaire bias did not make itself too strongly felt, in the minuteness with which Prince Albert dealt with English politics; but the net result of his influence was that the danger which lies in wait for strictly constitutional Sovereigns was averted – the danger, that is, of leaving the administration of State affairs in the hands of specialists, and depriving it of the wise control and independent criticism, which only the Crown can adequately supply.' This opinion is the more remarkable when we remember the – we may almost say – official quarter from

<sup>1</sup> Arthur Christopher Benson and Viscount Esher.

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which it comes, and that it was written a bare seven years after the death of the Queen. Since Stockmar's death more than forty years had passed.

But in the meantime the waves had once more risen high above Stockmar.

It is impossible within the compass of this book to consider exhaustively the attractive question: Which among public men have the right, by reason of their personality and the sphere of their activities, to write memoirs and to describe them as historical or human documents? Most memoirs suffer from the fact that their writer is inclined enormously to over-estimate himself and his influence on his times. But in passing it is necessary to refer to this interesting subject, because a man like Stockmar, whose greatest asset was his absolute discretion and his never doubted reliability, would have seemed to be the very last from whom memoirs could have been expected. With their publication Stockmar's personality completely shifted; the appearance of the dead man was altered. At his decease no written paper of any kind ought to have been found in the Secretary's secretary.

The most attractive and most reliable memoirs are assuredly those which were not intended for publication. A man who makes honest and truthful entries in his diary – later remembrances are always unreliable and construed *ex eventu* – must of necessity be so indiscreet that publication becomes a question of good taste. But the man who keeps diaries and writes memoirs with a view to their publication will be compelled in every sentence to manipulate the truth. Francis Baring, afterwards Lord Northbrook, says on one occasion that those are best qualified to write about history who were actually present. It is impossible fully to agree with this view; very often those who were present lack the requisite distance, the necessary perspective, to enable them to write objective – that is, correct – history. Active co-operation in the events will always entail a subjective

interpretation. But for the historian the material so collected will be of the very greatest value. With the same limitation we may accept Baring's view: 'The truth is that writers in their closets who know nothing of real affairs bring you a story quite unlike the reality, though they have had great materials before them.' But full assent must be given by everyone to Baring's further dictum, 'To write history really well requires many of the qualities of a statesman.' But the statesman is the man above all others who has the right – perhaps even the duty – to write memoirs with a view to their publication. A statesman is responsible, before history, to his country and his reputation. He intends to lay bare the reasons for his actions, the thoughts which impelled him towards a certain course; in doing this he is the servant of truth and helps in the subsequent writing of history. This is true even if, as is so often the case, the memoirs are nothing but justifications – and even ineffective as such.

Stockmar, however, the invisible man behind the Throne, was not a statesman, nor was he responsible to history – quite certainly not to 'his own' country. His responsibility was only to his employers, and therefore it was an indiscretion that only nine years after his death, eleven years after that of Prince Albert, his memoirs should appear. The wise saying of the unknown Roman, 'Proximus ille Deo est qui scit ratione tacere,' was unknown to Stockmar during his life, and in his death he did not heed it. The memoirs lack true perspective; his whole point of view regarding the great events in which he took part is purely subjective; the opinions are dictated by boundless vanity clad in the garb of a discreet modesty. Everything which ended well was his merit; everything which ended badly was the fault of others. Leopold and Albert are described as if they had been held completely in his leading-strings. His judgments also are ugly, malicious, unfavourable, and therefore false – Wellington: 'blinded by the language of his admirers and too much elated to estimate correctly his own powers' and

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'insufficient mental gifts'; Derby: 'A frivolous<sup>1</sup> aristocrat, who delights in making mischief'; Melbourne: 'Careless and weak'; Palmerston: 'I think the man has been for some time insane'; and of *The Times* he says that it is 'influenced or bought.'

It is in itself a crass contradiction, which must be harmful to the picture as a whole, when a man who knowingly worked in the background, who ever refused to come out into the open, is after his death suddenly placed in the glare of the searchlight. Stockmar was the very man whose personality might with time have developed into a legendary mysterious figure, into a man who made Princes and Kings, but himself remained invisible in the background. But the contradiction is made the stronger by reason of the words of his son, Ernest,<sup>2</sup> who published the memoirs: 'He was content to remain always half-hidden before the eyes of posterity. Faithful to his spirit, this book also lifts the veil but a little.' If this sentence is intended to be a justification, it has failed of its object. The responsibility for the publication of the memoirs becomes the greater owing to the statement 'that none of the Courts in which Stockmar's life was passed, the Courts of Saxe-Coburg, Belgium, England, and Prussia, has been consulted or allowed to exercise any censorship on the volume now before us.' Nobody who has as much as glanced at the memoirs will be prepared to doubt this: not one of the Courts would have consented to the publication; not one but would have prevented it. That the son alone, on his own responsibility, on his own initiative, should have formed the plan to publish the memoirs is difficult to believe and can hardly be assumed; he had too much at stake. Thus there remains but one other possibility, one explanation: in a confidential hour the father entrusted the son – machiavellistically – with the future publication, or, when the talk turned to the subject, he raised no objection – left the decision to the son.

<sup>1</sup> See p. 29.

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix 5.

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That the influence of Stockmar and his position in English politics is strongly exaggerated in the connecting text which accompanies the memoirs may be pardoned to the son, but not to the editor. Even Max Mueller, who supervised and prefaced the English edition, is of opinion that 'by his son the importance of his father's position and his influence with the statesmen and sovereigns of Europe has been somewhat exaggerated' (and 'it has been said that in one or two cases, the feelings of those who still survive might have been more fully considered'). With the memoirs the son achieved the very opposite of his intention – he only harmed the memory of his father. Vanity is an evil finger-post.

At no time of his adventurous life, not when the waves rose high against him and his dark influence, not when death closed his eyes, was nearly so much written about Stockmar, did he stand so much in the centre of discussion, as at the time when his memoirs came out. *The Times* informed its readers of his death in five words: 'Baron Stockmar died last night'; the memoirs were discussed in six full columns.

There was a vast divergence in the views of Stockmar's character, his personality; not till then did the general public learn with amazement the part which this man had played. In none of the critiques was the value of the book under-estimated as a source for future research, but nearly all stressed the view that the publication, especially at that time, was an impropriety. The *Edinburgh Review* calls it an 'indecorum of the compiler, who, in order to make good his father's claims to the notice of the world, has torn aside the veil which enshrouded his father's memory.' Still more severe was the verdict of the *Athenæum*; it said that the book was a master source for the history of the last forty years, and ought to be in the library of every student of history, but 'in the interest and for the honour of literature there remains something of a widely different nature to be said.'



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The critic of that review then raises the question whether it could be consistent with the code of honour that the memoirs of a man should be published who described himself, and in the memoirs is exalted, as 'the friend, confidant, counsellor, and mentor of Princes – confessor, intimate friend, and mentor of persons in high political positions.'

From this conflict of opinions there can be no doubt that countless documents were printed in these memoirs which on no consideration ought to have been made public at that early date, as many of them did not scruple to refer to the family life of his master and mistress. It could be, and rightly was, pointed out with justifiable pride that hardly another Royal House could have borne the publication of such details of its family life, from the most private workshop of its political deliberations. It is therefore particularly attractive and interesting to see what the Queen thought of the publication. She was not satisfied with it, not so much that the memoirs had come out too soon, as because neither her husband nor Stockmar had been put into the correct light. In order, therefore, to 'put the things before the world in a worthier light incumbent on her in the interest alike of the Prince and her dear Baron,' she did, with her usual energy, everything she could to accelerate the publication of the work on Albert which she had commissioned. General Grey's *Early Years of the Prince Consort* had already appeared; but his current duties as Private Secretary of the Queen took up too much of his time to enable him to describe in a 'representation as faithful as it possibly can be' (as the Queen wished) thoroughly and exhaustively the later years also. Sir Arthur Helps, Clerk of the Council, had recommended Theodore Martin, 'a German scholar and far from political bias.' After the appearance of Stockmar's memoirs the Queen promoted, with a zeal which could hardly be exceeded, the publication of Martin's comprehensive work, *The Life of the Prince Consort*. Theodore Martin it was who

reviewed Stockmar's memoirs in the *Quarterly Review*, but anonymously. As, however, the article was included – true, not till thirty-four years later – in a collection of monographs from the pen of that writer, the interesting fact of its authorship became known. The leading thread of the critique was 'to qualify what the Queen thought to be the ill effects of the publication,' and it is worthy of notice that Martin, who in his critique may be looked upon to quite a special extent as the mouthpiece of his august principal, also expresses the opinion that there is much in the memoirs about which 'it would be premature to speak.' That Stockmar is included among 'the ablest diplomatists and statesmen of his time' is, having regard to the trend of this critique, no longer to be wondered at.

From a quite unexpected quarter came a critique of the memoirs – from Gladstone, who found fault with the translator for rendering *leichtsinnig*, applied to Lord Derby, as 'frivolous.' Gladstone had preferred 'light-minded': 'The difference between frivolous and light-minded is not a broad one, but in my opinion a man is frivolous by disposition, whereas he is light-minded by defect or perversity of will; further, he is frivolous all over, he may be light-minded on one side of his character. So it was in an eminent degree with Lord Derby.'

Apart from this blot in the translation, Gladstone had an especial reason not to be satisfied with the Stockmar memoirs. The memorandum on Constitutional Questions and the position of the Monarch in the Constitution, which Stockmar prepared for Albert, could not of course give pleasure to the Liberal statesman. The latter saw in a 'Constitutional Monarchy with a Liberal Cabinet in office, the sum and crown of human political wisdom.' Apart from this, he read into that memorandum an attack on the Aberdeen Ministry. And in that Ministry he had been Chancellor of the Exchequer. And when, twenty years later, the memoirs came out, his resentment had not yet cooled off,

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and he is described as 'treating this memoir with his contempt.' How strong would the resentment of the temperamental statesman have been if he had known that, according to Stockmar's ideas, the Whigs were people who, intentionally or unintentionally, by their politics prepared the way for a republic!

With Sir Theodore Martin, who in the meantime had been knighted, Gladstone had an especial discussion (see Appendix 6).

. . . . .

Stockmar had no direct successor, but the next generation of Private Secretaries at Court – Anson, Phipps, Grey, and, as the last of this period, Biddulph – may to a certain extent be described as belonging to his school. They all profited by his excellent system of thoroughness, by his way of treating affairs and preparing matters up to the very last decision, without falling into his one-sidedness and his faults. In one important respect these later advisers differed from the first – they were all Englishmen. That fact alone sufficed to prevent the appearance of many of the former causes of friction between the Sovereign and her Ministers.

It is an error to qualify Hermann Sahl as Stockmar's successor. Sahl dealt with a part of the correspondence, drafted the official letters of congratulation and condolence, and acted as librarian at Balmoral and Osborne. He only did routine work, without ever being in the position to give political advice. (The painter Angeli was especially attached to him, and once and for all refused to appear at Court except in Sahl's company.)

His work as librarian at Osborne and Balmoral was probably not too exacting. As far as is known, Sahl was once, and once only, disturbed in the repose of his study. He was fond of pony-riding, and does not seem to have known what an impossible rider he was. But the Queen knew all about it, and, anxious about her beautiful hill

ponies, she had decided to restrict the pony-riding to those who understood horses, probably having been told stories about the inconsiderate manner in which the ponies were treated, and in addition she had forbidden to let it be known that the veto had originated with her. It was the sculptor Edgar Boehm, Canon Duckworth, and Hermann Sahl who were chiefly affected by this veto. Sahl placed himself at the head of the complainants, being of the opinion that it was a personal trick on the part of the then Equerry, subsequent Private Secretary, Ponsonby. It was impossible to get the much offended librarian to understand that the command came from the Queen herself. Deeply angry, he complained about Ponsonby in a 'most outrageous letter' to the Queen, whose son-in-law, Prince Christian, was also dragged into this 'Affair of State.' Although all the parties lived under the same roof, yet for weeks the most absurd letters were exchanged. 'The amusing part of the squabble was that, if either of these three had been asked to mount a horse, none of them would have dared to do so.'

The matter was still further complicated owing to the fact that Sahl had written to the Queen in German. It was, therefore, not quite clear whether the complaints which he had made about Ponsonby were to be translated as 'arrogance,' 'coarseness,' or 'rudeness,' or how they were to be taken.

Eventually Sahl apologised to Ponsonby. It is, however, worth pointing out that this 'Pony-Row' occupied everyone at Balmoral from the end of August to the end of November, and assuredly contributed much to the gaiety of the Queen in the autumn of the year 1869. For she was kept fully informed by Lady Churchill of everything concerning this 'storm in a teacup.'

With this unheroic fight, which was not even allowed to be fought out on pony-back, Hermann Sahl disappeared from the annals of history.

## CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE

BARON CHRISTIAN FRIEDRICH VON STOCKMAR  
(THE COBURG MARRIAGES)

- 1787 Stockmar born in Coburg, August 22nd.
- 1790 Leopold of Saxe-Coburg born.
- 1796 Charlotte, d. of the Prince Regent (George IV) born.
- 1805-10 Stockmar student of medicine.
- 1816 *Marriage* of Leopold of Saxe-Coburg and Princess Charlotte.  
Stockmar's arrival in Claremont.
- 1817 Charlotte died.
- 1818 Marriages of the Dukes of Cambridge, Clarence and Kent.
- 1819 Victoria, d. of the Duke of Kent, born May 24th.  
Albert of Saxe-Coburg, born August 26th.
- 1821 Stockmar receives Saxon nobility.  
Stockmar's marriage with his cousin Fanny Sommer.
- 1829-30 Leopold of Saxe-Coburg's candidature for the Greek Throne.
- 1831 Leopold of Saxe-Coburg King of the Belgians.  
Stockmar raised to the rank of Baron in Bavaria.
- 1832 *Marriage* of King Leopold and Louise of Orleans, d. of King Louis Philippe. (Their grandson was Albert, the late King of the Belgians.)
- 1834-36 Stockmar mainly in Coburg.
- 1836 Stockmar's preparations for the accession of Princess Victoria.  
Albert of Saxe-Coburg's first visit in England.  
*Marriage* of Ferdinand of Saxe-Coburg and Maria da Gloria, Queen of Portugal. (Among their great-grandsons are Manoel, the last King of Portugal, and Carol, the present King of Roumania.)

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- 1837 Victoria's majority, May 24th.  
Stockmar's arrival in England, May 25th.  
Queen Victoria's accession, June 20th.
- 1837-38 Stockmar Private Secretary to Queen Victoria.
- 1838 Stockmar and Prince Albert in Italy.
- 1839 *Marriage* of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg.
- 1840 Stockmar raised to the rank of Baron in Austria.  
Princess Royal (Empress Frederick) born.  
*Marriage* of Victoria of Saxe-Coburg and the Duc de Nemours, son of King Louis Philippe.
- 1840-47 The Spanish marriages.
- 1841 Prince of Wales (King Edward VII) born.
- 1842 King Frederick William IV of Prussia in England.  
*Marriage* of Prince Augustus of Saxe-Coburg and Clementine of Orleans, d. of King Louis Philippe.  
(Their son is King Ferdinand of Bulgaria, father of the present King Boris.)
- 1843 *Marriage* of Prince Ferdinand of Saxe-Coburg and Maria Clementine, d. of King Louis Philippe.
- 1847 Queen Maria of Portugal appeals to Queen Victoria for protection.
- 1848 Revolution in Prussia.  
Prince William (Emperor William I) refugee in England.  
Stockmar Deputy for Coburg at German Diet.
- 1854 Popular suspicion of Prince Albert.
- 1857 Prince Albert receives title of Prince Consort.  
Stockmar's final departure from England.
- 1858 *Marriage* of the Princess Royal and Prince Frederick of Prussia (Emperor Frederick III).  
Stockmar in Berlin and Potsdam.
- 1860 Queen Victoria and Prince Consort visit Stockmar in Coburg.
- 1861 Prince Consort died, December 14th.
- 1863 Stockmar died, July 9th.
- 1872 Stockmar's memoirs published: Germany, May; England, November.

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### APPENDIX 1

This younger brother, Charles Stockmar, 'went into business at Augsburg, and there chanced to be charged for a long time with the money affairs of Queen Hortense, Louis Napoleon's mother. Later in life he entered the service of the King of the Belgians, and till his death had the management of the King's private property.' It is incredible that Charles Stockmar should have been in the service of Queen Hortense. It has been impossible to find any reference to this, and only the above quotation in Ernest Stockmar's biographical sketch of his father mentions Uncle Charles in such a connection. In view of the inclination of the family to exaggerate everything Stockmarian it may be assumed that Charles was employed by a firm in Augsburg who had charge of Hortense's money affairs.

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### APPENDIX 2

Louise Lehzen, the daughter of a Hanoverian clergyman, came to England as governess to Princess Feodore of Leiningen, Queen Victoria's half-sister, shortly before the Queen's birth. In 1824 she became governess to the Princess Victoria. In 1827, George IV, as King of Hanover, conferred upon her the rank of a Hanoverian Baroness. When the Duchess of Northumberland was appointed the Princess's official governess in 1830, she remained as lady in attendance. After the accession she still continued her activities behind the Throne, without holding an official position, till 1842, and then returned to Germany. Baroness Lehzen died in 1870 in Bückeburg.

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### APPENDIX 3

Amongst the many sayings and opinions of Stockmar there are such a number of platitudes, brought forth with so little humour and so much complacency, that we are more and more surprised to find that this man, without inspiration and without imagination, should have had such a career, have filled such a sphere of activity. We reproduce only one, which at the present moment

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is of special interest, since capital punishment in some countries is again among the political tools with which it is impossible to dispense. 'Stockmar was for limiting the application of it as much as possible, but quite against its total abolition, even in political crimes, which, as he said, are often more serious in their consequences than any private offence. His reasons for this were, first, that he thought private revenge, for the prevention of which the severity of the law was enacted, could not be prevented without it; and, secondly, that on the masses fear of death would exert a preventive influence impossible in the case of any other punishment.'

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### APPENDIX 4

The Prussian Princes have with a certain Prussian obstinacy offered for the hands of English Princesses. Augustus had wooed Charlotte; Prince Adalbert had asked for the hand of Victoria.

The correspondence in which Prince Adalbert submitted himself as an aspirant to the hand of the young heiress to the English Throne is not generally known; nor does it appear in the official publication of the letters to, from, and about the Queen. The style of Lord William Russell, the English Minister in Berlin, laconic, purely businesslike, is particularly amusing:

'Lord William Russell to the Duchess of Kent.

'MADAM,—Would it be agreeable to your Royal Highness that Prince Adalbert of Prussia, the son of Prince William, should place himself on the list of those who pretend to the hand of H.R.H. the Princess Victoria?

'Your consent, Madam, would give great satisfaction to the Court of Berlin.'

The answer of the Duchess is characteristic of the attitude which she had assumed, as mother of the future Sovereign:

'MY LORD,—I have to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 3rd inst., asking me if it would be agreeable to me that the Prince Adalbert of Prussia might be allowed to seek the hand of the Princess Victoria, and that my consent



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would give great satisfaction at the Court of Berlin. The undoubted confidence placed in me by the country, being the only parent since the Restoration who has had the uncontrolled power in bringing up the heir of the Throne, imposes on me duties of no ordinary character. Therefore I could not, compatibly with those I owe my child, the King, and the country, give your Lordship the answer you desire; the application should go to the King. But if I know my duty to the King, I know also my maternal ones, and I will candidly tell your Lordship that I am of opinion that the Princess should not marry till she is much older. I will also add that, in the choice of the person to share her great destiny, I have but one wish—that her happiness and the interest of the country be realised in it.’

Lord William answered thus:

‘MADAM,—I have received the letter your Royal Highness did me the honour to write to me. On informing Prince Wittgenstein [Minister of the Royal House in Berlin] that your maternal feelings led you to think the Princess Victoria too young to marry, he said that the King of Prussia would, on learning your opinion, object to Prince Adalbert’s projected journey to England.

‘I beg to observe to your Royal Highness, that it was only proposed to admit Prince Adalbert to the list of suitors for the hand of Princess Victoria, to which he was to win his claim by his character and personal attractions.’

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## APPENDIX 5

Ernest Stockmar (1823–1886) had published various works dealing with political science, international law, and history. His special study was the French Revolution (one of the essays relates to the ‘Flight of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette to Montmédy in the year 1791’). A book about Washington is dedicated to his father: ‘I have often heard you call Washington your favourite hero.’

Immediately after the marriage (1858) of the Princess Royal with the Prussian Prince, subsequently Emperor Frederick, he

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was appointed Private Secretary of the young Victoria. But as early as 1864 a serious illness, connected with his lameness, forced him to resign his post and to give up all public activities.

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### APPENDIX 6

During Palmerston's second Ministry the Fortifications Bill was up for discussion in the House of Commons. Albert wrote to Stockmar as to these deliberations, 'Gladstone continues in the Ministry, but on the condition that he shall be free next year to attack and denounce the fortifications, to the construction of which he this year gives his assent, and the money. Palmerston laughingly yielded this condition to him.' In a further letter, addressed to the Queen, who was away, the Prince Consort reports. 'Mr. Gladstone told Viscount Palmerston this evening that he wished it to be understood that, though acquiescing in the step now taken about the fortifications, he kept himself free to take such course as he may think fit upon that subject next year, to which Viscount Palmerston entirely assented. That course will probably be the same which Mr. Gladstone has taken this year, namely, ineffectual opposition and ultimate acquiescence.' Into the details of the boring and lengthy discussions in this battle for economy it is not possible to go. A compromise was arrived at, 'keeping clear, as Mr. Gladstone supposed, of the fortification scheme as a whole, and not pledging future years.' Theodore Martin's publication of those letters excited Gladstone's strongest indignation. In a letter to the Duke of Argyll, written at that time, he makes his position clear, and 'this account contains probably the only reply I shall ever make to an account given or printed by Sir Theodore Martin in his *Life of the Prince Consort* which is most injurious to me, without a shadow of foundation: owing, I have no doubt, to defective acquaintance with the subject.' It must be specially pointed out that the memoirs of Stockmar, to whom one of the letters forming the basis of the controversy was addressed, do not reproduce it: the whole incident is, in fact, not mentioned.



# GEORGE ANSON



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**F**OR a young and ambitious Princeling, belonging to a small German House, which had only just begun to be known in Europe, it was the start of a most promising career to become the husband of a Queen of England; many of his peers in the great reigning families may well have envied Albert this unique position. In itself, however, this position was full of contradictions and vagueness, and required the highly developed tact, the discretion of a person of strong character like Albert, to be able to find a clear line, a compensation for the constant and daily possibilities of friction. It was from the outset a serious problem to intend to wed a young lady, the mighty Queen of a great country, when the only asset which one could oneself bring into the union consisted of the talents and capabilities of a husband. Albert's road to future consideration and high position led, in truth, not over the smooth parquet flooring of the reception-rooms, where he often appeared tired at a not far advanced hour, nor yet over the council rooms of the innumerable committees over which he presided, and in which his scientific and artistic proposals were not too willingly accepted; his road to ascendancy, to success, led solely and simply by way of the nursery. Here Albert was irreproachable – a punctilious husband.

He had not yet arrived on English soil when the first difficulties arose, had not yet signed the marriage contract<sup>1</sup> when dissensions with his future wife had to be cleared up. It was not easy to arrive at an understanding as to the composition of the immediate entourage of the Prince. He would have preferred to bring with him Germans, who

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix 1.

## BEHIND THE THRONE

were closer to his nature, with whom it would have been easier for him to come to an understanding. If it could not be a German, he wanted at the least to choose himself his Private Secretary, and he suggested Francis Seymour.<sup>1</sup> This young gentleman had been one of the companions on the Italian trial journey, under the main supervision of Stockmar, and his task had been to make Albert acquainted with English conditions, to speak and read English with him. Albert's appeal, coming from a future husband, sounds somewhat weak: 'Except yourself, I have no one to confide in. And is it not even to be conceded to me, that the two or three persons, who are to have the charge of my private affairs, shall be persons who already command my confidence?' It produced no result. Melbourne had already made his proposal, which the Queen accepted. The young George Anson, then the Private Secretary of the Prime Minister, 'greatly wishes to be with you. I am very much in favour of it, because he is an excellent young man, and very modest, very honest, very steady, very well informed, and will be of much use to you.' Albert's opposition was not directed against Anson himself; he was not mistaken in looking upon this appointment as a strengthening at Court of the Liberal influence, which already consisted entirely of Whigs; even the ladies in the entourage of the Queen were Liberal peeresses or Whig daughters, and this one-sided composition of the Court was bound, at a future date when Melbourne had ceased to be Prime Minister, to lead to discussions with his successor (Bedchamber question). On Melbourne's part, the nomination of Anson to so strategically important a bridge-head was tactically a very clever move – it was thus possible betimes to lead the possible influence of the future husband in the right way!

But Albert was very cautious and clever and desired to constitute his Court as impartially as possible, and in this policy he was doubtless influenced by Stockmar. But the Queen

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix 2.

was not to be moved: 'It is, as you rightly suppose, my greatest, my most anxious wish to do everything most agreeable to you, but I must differ with you respecting Mr. Anson. . . . What I said about Anson giving you advice means, that if you like to ask him, he can and will be of the greatest use to you, as he is a very well-informed person. He will leave Lord Melbourne as soon as he is appointed about you. With regard to your last objection, that it would make you a party man if you took the Secretary of the Prime Minister as your Treasurer, I do not agree in it; for, though I am very anxious you should not appear to belong to a party, still it is necessary that your Household should not form a too strong contrast to mine, else they will say, "Oh, we know the Prince says he belongs to no party, but we are sure he is a Tory!" Therefore it is also necessary that it should appear that you went with me in having some of your people who are staunch Whigs; but Anson is not in Parliament, and never was, and therefore he is not a violent politician. Do not think, because I urge this, Lord M. prefers it; on the contrary, he never urged it, and I only do it as I know it is for your own good. You will pardon this long story. It will also not do to wait till you come to appoint all your people.\* I am distressed to tell you what I fear you do not like, but it is necessary, my dearest, most excellent Albert. Once more I tell you that you can perfectly rely on me in these matters.' What could he do? True it is he continued to maintain the view that he ought decidedly to have been allowed to choose so very confidential an official himself. But *Regina locuta est*, and, as Albert could expect no further support from Stockmar either – matters had already gone too far – there was nothing left for the Prince to do but to agree to the appointment.

Thus George Anson, of the family of the Earls of Lichfield, became officially the Treasurer – in fact the Private Secretary – of Albert, much to the latter's annoyance. Many disappointments were in store for the young Prince;



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but the choice of Anson and his collaboration did not turn out to be one. The initial distrust was followed by a sincere friendship.

During his term of office as Melbourne's Private Secretary, Anson was involved as second in a duel which at the time raised a good deal of dust. James Bradshaw, a Conservative M.P., had had the bad taste to make a personal attack on the Queen, and had called her 'a tissue of folly and impertinence.' Edward Horsman, a Liberal M.P., when addressing his constituents, refuted this insult to the Sovereign, and said that Bradshaw had 'the tongue of a traitor and the heart of a coward,' and, in addition, sent to his opponent, through George Anson, a challenge to a duel. Bradshaw's second was Colonel Gurwood, the former adjutant of Wellington, and just appointed Governor of the Tower. Anson tried to explain to Gurwood that he was acting in a wrong affair which would seriously compromise his position as officer. During these negotiations it appeared that Gurwood did not at all know what the real question was, and that he was not in the least aware of the disloyal speech of his principal. But, as he had given his consent to act as second, he refused to recall it. This made any further attempt at negotiation impossible, and the two opponents met at Wormwood Scrubs. The prescribed number of shots was fired without any shedding of blood. To Bradshaw's inquiry from his opponent whether he would now withdraw the offensive remarks, Anson answered for the latter, 'Not until you have apologised for the insults to the Queen.' Both parties expressed themselves in agreement with this; Anson drew up a statement which Bradshaw signed, whereupon Horsman withdrew his remarks. Thus the episode terminated.

From the very first moment the Queen had been opposed to Albert's taking any part in politics; with great energy she brought forward the argument, 'The English are very jealous of any foreigner interfering in the government of this

country, and have already in some of the papers (which are friendly to me and you) expressed a hope that you would not interfere.' Here are no longer 'the flowers of May' but rather a definite refusal, a denial of any fruitful activity. But it is bound to be particularly noticeable that the Queen showed a much clearer judgment concerning the hated 'foreigners' here, where she is dealing with her future husband, than she had done in her own affairs in the past, for the objections to Stockmar had always been, and continued to be, overlooked. 'Now, though I know you never would, they would all say, the Prince meant to play a political part. I am certain you will understand this, but it is better not to say anything more about it now.'

The exertions of Stockmar were from the start directed quite in the opposite direction; behind the Throne he made every possible effort to obtain for his pupil a field of activity, a sphere of influence. It was impossible to deduce a participation in affairs from the Prince's capacity of husband of the Queen Regnant. The shrewd doctor had no difficulty in finding a way out, and evolved this thesis: The natural adviser of a wife is her husband, and there is no reason why that husband should not function as the Private Secretary of his Royal wife; he saw still less objection to this plan as Albert had been sworn in to the Privy Council. It was Stockmar, the very wise observer and judge of human nature, who, a very few months later, saw how things really stood in that very problematical marriage, how painfully Albert was bound to feel the very unequal division of forces. He felt so 'shut out,' so isolated, that he had even applied to Melbourne in order to obtain from the Queen a change in her methods. Stockmar, true to himself, did nothing personally, but turned to Anson: 'The Prince leans more on you than on anyone else and gives you his entire confidence; you are honest, moral, and religious, and will not belie that trust. The Queen has not started upon a right principle.' Anson understood the hint.

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It does not require any special knowledge of psychology to understand the dangers to which the Royal marriage was exposed in these early days. The wishes of the two spouses were of necessity of an entirely opposite kind: the Queen, filled with tenderest love for Albert, wanted in the evening to put the affairs of the day on one side, to hear nothing of them; she wanted to be only woman and wife.<sup>1</sup> Rest and recreation were an urgent need for her in these hours. Albert, on the other hand, wanted to hear, to know; wished to take part in everything and express his own views in the conversation. During the day he was condemned to a passivity exceeding that borne by a wife of the middle classes. His active mind demanded the right to join in advice, to take part in things. Thus each spouse asked of the other just that which circumstances made it impossible to grant. It required time, goodwill, and especially strong affection on both sides in order gradually to achieve a compromise – and it was achieved. That the dissensions did not extend, that in a comparatively short time they disappeared and gave place to a fine human confidence which perhaps was not in entire accord with the strict requirements of the Constitution, was due to the adroit and discreet exertions of Anson.

Very slowly the Prince had to work himself in, to try carefully to have his own way, and avoid everything which could in any way be interpreted to his disadvantage. Albert had every reason to be grateful that he had at his side a man like Anson, who was not merely an executory tool, but possessed personal credit at Court and in political circles, and thus was in a position to support the influence of his master *vis-à-vis* the Royal authority. The Queen slowly emerged from her seclusion when she saw that good work was being done in Albert's study; she became more communicative, and took the habit of discussing more and more matters with her husband, to give him more and more insight into

<sup>1</sup> See Anson's memorandum of May 28th, 1840, Appendix 3.



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*by* G. RICHMOND

*Rischgitz*



current affairs. An outward sign of this compensation of forces in the Royal marriage appeared in the fact that the Queen, 'in announcing her decision on public questions to her Ministers, substituted for the singular pronoun "I" the plural "we," and this entirely identified her own judgment with her husband's.' After barely two years of married life, the last partitions had fallen, and Anson could see with satisfaction that his exertions had been successful. Stockmar had placed Albert in the saddle, but it was Anson who taught him to ride.

George Anson had been preceded by the reputation of being 'a tried, discreet, and sensible man, high-bred in feeling as in bearing, capable without prompting of giving good advice when asked, and incapable of the folly of making a suggestion when it was not wanted.' He was quite incapable of intrigue – and the peculiarity of his position, as a kind of breakwater in the initial storms of the subsequently so united Royal marriage, would have seemed to call for it.

But at the moment Albert's road was not yet quite clear; not until a further obstacle, a centre of influence behind the Throne directed against him, had been cleared out of the way, could he feel that he was really master in the house and in the family. Baroness Lehzen, who had erected a barrier round the Queen which it was impossible to penetrate, was still present, very invisible and elusive. Carefully, without haste, this position had to be captured; 'people are beginning much better to understand the lady's character, and time must surely work its own ends.' In this invisible fight for the confidence of the Queen, Anson stood unreservedly on the side of his master.<sup>1</sup> Endless care had to be taken, for not only had the feelings of the Queen to be considered, but the fight had to be carried on without her knowledge. Clever as Lehzen was, yet she was not clever

<sup>1</sup> In two memoranda, the second made roughly fifteen months after the first, Anson writes his views and experiences in this peculiar fight; they are reproduced in Appendices 3 and 4.

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enough and not far-sighted enough. In her dread of losing position and influence she had gone too far, made herself impossible, kept letters back, and thus dug her own grave. She had to leave the Court. Now Albert's road was really free. In this fight and its result the victor was, in addition to Albert, his confidant Anson, the man with 'professional knowledge and habits'; his position and his prestige had gained enormously; now he became 'the unseen man, the moving spirit.'

The activities of both master and servant were manifold. There was Mrs. Lilly to be watched, that important person, Nannie in the nursery, to whom Stockmar also devoted much attention, and in spite of this multiple supervision the worthy lady is said – true, only according to a cartoon – to have sung the little Prince to sleep with 'Hey diddle diddle, the cat and the fiddle.' At this moment the Prince, upset by these frivolous words, entered and said, 'Vat you talk such nonsense to mine son for? Tell him he be Prince of Wales and de Duck of Cornwall, den he will understand you much better.' – Then the City men and the Fishmongers had to be appeased when Albert, in spite of having accepted, could not make up his mind late in the evening to go from Buckingham Palace to the Guildhall. – Then there was endless bother when Albert and Stockmar began the reorganisation of the Royal palaces from the Lord Chamberlain down to the window-cleaners; at last even the Press took up this matter, and this led to all kinds of trouble. Anson's view was that Saunders, the Palace Inspector, who, hurt by Stockmar's interference, had resigned his office, had in his anger given information to the papers. Then there was the purchase of Osborne, which brought work and responsibility, and the Queen referred to Anson 'for particulars of the new property, which is very extensive, as she is not at all competent to explain about acres, etc.'

Before the big political affairs could be tackled, the faithful Anson had to try and overcome another matter. Sometimes Prince Albert was bored at Court in a thoroughly bourgeois

manner. Melbourne had discussed this with Anson, who, in true Stockmar style, drafted a memorandum about it: 'The Prince is bored with the sameness of his chess every evening. He would like to bring literary and scientific people about the Court, vary the society, and infuse a more useful tendency into it. The Queen, however, has no fancy to encourage such people. This arises from a feeling on her part that her education has not fitted her to take part in such conversation, she would not like conversation to be going on in which she could not take her fair share, and she is far too open and candid in her nature to pretend to one atom more knowledge than she really possesses on such subjects; and yet, as the world goes, she would, as any girl, have been considered accomplished, for she speaks German well and writes it; understands Italian, speaks French fluently, and writes it with great elegance. In addition to this, old Davys<sup>1</sup> instilled some Latin into her during his tutorship. The rest of her education she owes to her own natural shrewdness and quickness, and this perhaps has not been the proper education for one who was to wear the Crown of England.'

Melbourne continued according to Anson's notes: 'The Queen is very proud of the Prince's utter indifference to the attractions of all ladies. I told Her Majesty that these were early days to boast, which made her rather indignant. I think she is a little jealous of his talking much even to men.' But this was a matter in which nothing could be done; no one could help, not even Anson, and it is probable that Albert continued to be often bored during the hours between the end of the day's work and the time of going to bed. The Queen here took a somewhat narrow standpoint; she herself cared little for intercourse with any but Court circles, and nothing at all for artists. But she did not want Albert to have any such intercourse either. 'The dealings with artists, for instance, require great prudence; they are

<sup>1</sup> Rev. George Davys.



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acquainted with all classes of society, and for that very reason dangerous; they are hardly ever satisfied, and when you have too much to do with them, you are sure to have *des ennuis*.' . . . Assuredly it is necessary, in any intercourse with artists, sometimes to put up with little *ennuis*, but the Prince had to deal with his great *ennui* by himself. It is to be feared that he never quite got over it. To please the Queen he had, as Anson reports, even given up his chess and had taken part in 'some round game at cards.' Not much time was left him for his own amusements: 'His amusements – shooting or hunting – always commence and terminate between eleven and two, not to interfere with Her Majesty's arrangements, in which he is included as her companion.' Anson observed and recorded all this; to alter it was beyond him.

But all these were matters and worries of secondary importance. Stern realities, historical events, soon appeared above the horizon of the life at Court which up to then had followed the even tenor of its way.

Melbourne's resignation was the most important event of the Victorian reign up to this date; for the first time the young Queen was faced with the task of forming a Government. The responsibility of all persons constituting the immediate *entourage* of the Sovereign was bound to increase, for up to then Melbourne had thought of everything and for everybody; now it had to be seen if the husband, who was so anxious to be allowed to collaborate, was also able to take his part in counsel. The departure of the Prime Minister had to prove whether those who up to then had constituted only an executive were in a position to propound their own ideas, to develop an initiative. For Anson, Albert's official adviser, Melbourne's resignation might become of appreciable importance, and in sincere gratitude, moved by a strong sense of the importance of the hour, he took leave of his former immediate chief: 'We are now on the eve of commencing a new era, and that cannot but

forcibly remind us of the past, and make me wish to express to you the deep and lasting sense of the obligation I am under to you personally, and which is constantly recurring to my mind. I owe you far more than I can ever hope to have an opportunity of showing you any acknowledgment for; but I hope I shall only be one of the many who will ever retain a most grateful recollection of the invariable kindness and benefits which I have received from my friend and patron.' Now the time had come for Anson to show that he also could achieve something. With the advance of Albert in the Royal confidence, with the participation of the Prince in Government affairs which had grown more difficult owing to the resignation of Melbourne, Anson too became a political factor. At all stages of this complicated change of Ministry, negotiations had to be carried on with Peel, and in nearly every phase Anson came forward, compromising and adjusting. His most difficult task, after the Peel Ministry had been formed and the changes in the Court personnel had taken place, lay in the negotiations which he had to carry on with Melbourne, or, rather, against him, when the retired Prime Minister could not make up his mind to end his correspondence with the Queen, and the practice of advising her in connection with it. It must assuredly have been painful for Anson to proceed against his former patron, but it is just as certain that a man like Anson would not have undertaken such a mission if he had not himself been convinced that in this correspondence Melbourne had gone beyond conventional and Constitutional limits. 'The Melbourne correspondence is still carried on, but I think not in its pristine vigour by any means,' wrote Anson in a memorandum; the remonstrances availed little, 'and we are in the dark in what manner, if at all, he means to deal with it.' Melbourne refused to give in, and finally this dangerous correspondence ceased of itself.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The exact happenings are described under 'Baron Stockmar,' pp. 58-60.

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At the early Victorian Court, Anson was one of the men who through their personality and knowledge had actual influence, and who never even for one moment used that influence for any selfish purpose. Their political thought, their entire personal being, had been dissolved in the Royal service. In the case of Anson, this boundless absorption in his service went so far that at no stage of his manifold work for a man of German birth, at whose side stood a man like Stockmar, is there the least indication that at the bottom of his heart he did not love the Germans, that in fact he was prejudiced against them.

Anson was not destined to spend many years at Court; quite suddenly, and without any previous warning, a stroke put an end to his career at the age of thirty-seven. His wife was with him when he was seized. 'She has borne,' the Queen writes, 'almost the greatest shock and trial which any human being could.' For Albert, hardly as yet firmly in the saddle, the loss was a heavy one. 'He was my only intimate friend. We went through everything together since I came here.' So greatly did the Prince feel the loss that the Queen, herself most deeply affected, observes with anxiety how many days later the husband's 'face is so sad and pale and grave.' The young couple were dissolved 'in floods of tears, and quite shut up. It is to them a heavy loss indeed,' remarked Lady Lyttelton.

For the first time death had made a gap in the ranks of the intimate advisers – for the first time the sorrowful cry was heard, 'Irreparable loss.'

The Queen, as yet unaware of her own energy and political abilities, which in later years were to be evidenced so brilliantly, felt herself threatened and perplexed. How many more times in the coming decades did not she, who survived almost the whole of her generation, have to mourn similar losses? Always they were to the august lady, who liked to move in extremes of sentiment, 'irreparable.' And yet difficulties arising from the decease of valuable helpers were

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always overcome with clear and quick foresight and an unerring instinct for the persons required.

Anson's place was filled by Phipps and Grey. But long afterwards the Queen thought of Anson in connection with Stockmar. The influence of these two men of the first period of the reign was felt, and remained alive, for several decades in the treatment of State affairs. For more than a generation future Private Secretaries are reminded how 'in former days much good was done by Baron Stockmar and Mr. Anson, paving the way for future arrangements and preventing complications at the moment.'

## CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE

GEORGE EDWARD ANSON, C.B., 1812-1849

- 1835 Junior clerk in the Treasury.  
1836-40 Private Secretary to Lord Melbourne.  
1837 Married Hon. Georgiana Mary Harbord. (1841-55,  
Woman of the Bedchamber; 1855, married (2)  
Charles Edward Boothby, of the P.C. Office.)  
1840 Private Secretary to Prince Albert.  
1842 Baroness Lehzen leaves the Court.  
1847-49 Keeper of the Privy Purse.

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### APPENDIX 1

Lord Broughton's entry in his diary of January 9th, 1840, shows how little discretion was used in some circles with regard to this (the Queen's!) marriage contract: 'We had some discussion as to the form in which the Royal marriage should be announced, and considered whether Prince Albert was competent to make a treaty of marriage. Palmerston showed the paper which Baron Stockmar had given him and asked if any one of us could read German in a written hand. Lord Clarendon took the paper, and, quietly reading it himself, explained the purport of it, and told us it was signed by Prince Albert himself, and not by his father. It was settled that Palmerston should arrange this paragraph.'

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### APPENDIX 2

GENERAL SIR FRANCIS SEYMOUR, BART., K.C.B., 1813-1890

- 1834 Army.  
1839 Met Prince Albert in Italy.

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- 1840-61 Groom in Waiting to the Prince Albert.
- 1854 Crimea; several times wounded; medal with four clasps.  
Colonel.
- 1859 C.B.
- 1861 Extra Groom to the Queen.
- 1864 Major-General.
- 1869 Created Baronet.  
Married Agnes Austin Wickham.
- 1876-90 Master of Ceremonies.
- 1877 General.
- 1879 K.C.B.
- 1881 Retired from the Army.

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## APPENDIX 3

*Memorandum by Mr. Anson*

*Minutes of Conversations with Lord Melbourne and Baron  
Stockmar*

28th May, 1840.

*Lord Melbourne:* 'I have spoken to the Queen, who says the Prince complains of a want of confidence on trivial matters, and on all matters connected with the politics of this country. She said it proceeded entirely from indolence; she knew it was wrong, but when she was with the Prince she preferred talking upon other subjects. I told Her Majesty that she should try and alter this, and that there was no objection to her conversing with the Prince upon any subject she pleased. My impression is that the chief obstacle in Her Majesty's mind is the fear of difference of opinion, and she thinks that domestic harmony is more likely to follow from avoiding subjects likely to create difference. My own experience leads me to think that subjects between man and wife, even where difference is sure to ensue, are much better discussed than avoided, for the latter course is sure to beget distrust. I do not think that the Baroness is the cause of this want of openness, though her name to me is never mentioned by the Queen.'

*Baron Stockmar:* 'I wish to have a talk with you. The Prince leans more on you than anyone else, and gives you his entire

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confidence; you are honest, moral, and religious, and will not belie that trust. The Queen has not started upon a right principle. She should by degrees impart everything to him, but there is danger in his wishing it all at once. A case may be laid before him; he may give some crude and unformed opinion; the opinion may be taken and the result disastrous, and a forcible argument is thus raised against advice being asked for the future.

'The Queen is influenced more than she is aware of by the Baroness. In consequence of that influence, she is not so ingenuous as she was two years ago. I do not think that the withholding of her confidence does proceed wholly from indolence, though it may partly arise, as the Prince suggests, from the entire confidence which she reposes in her present Ministers. . . .'

*Page 97*

### APPENDIX 4

*Memorandum by Mr. Anson*

*Windsor Castle,  
29th August, 1841.*

. . . Lord Melbourne said that the Prince had also entered upon the subject of the Baroness, and expressed the constant state of annoyance he was kept in by her interference. Lord Melbourne said to me: 'It will be far more difficult to remove her after the change of Government than now, because if pressed to do it by a Tory Minister, the Queen's prejudice would be immediately aroused.' I admitted this, but said that though the Prince felt that if he pressed the point against the Baroness remaining, he should be able to carry it, still his good feeling and affection for the Queen prevented him from pressing what he knew would be painful, and what could not be carried without an exciting scene; he must remain on his guard, and patiently abide the result. People were beginning much better to understand that lady's character, and time must surely work its own ends. . . .

# CHARLES PHIPPS





## CHARLES PHIPPS

THE descendants of Sir Constantine Phipps, Lord Chancellor of Ireland under Queen Anne, had developed into one of those great families which gave to the State loyal and zealous servants who occupied the most varied positions. The father of the young Charles, Viscount Normanby, first Earl of Mulgrave, was Pitt's chief military adviser, later in Pitt's second Cabinet Minister of Foreign Affairs, and subsequently First Lord of the Admiralty. His eldest son, the first Marquess of Normanby, had also occupied various posts and made a great career. Before taking office in Melbourne's Cabinet as Secretary of War and the Colonies, he had been Governor of Jamaica and Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland. In both the latter posts Charles had accompanied him as his diligent private secretary, so that on entering the service of the Court he possessed not merely tradition, but also experience and training.

Among all those who formed Albert's *entourage*, it was Phipps who most thoroughly knew and best understood his chief, who appeared so cool and reserved, and whose personality most resembled his; he most closely observed the character of the Prince and tried to reconcile his apparently divergent views. During his fifteen years' work with Albert, Phipps had passed through every phase with him, and knew his chief far longer and more intimately than Helps, the author of the monograph which preceded the *Leaves*. Most of the material for this work was supplied, in addition to the Queen, by Phipps. Helps, the practised writer and stylist, gave it its literary form.

The manifold artistic and social interests of the Prince found understanding and active assistance in Phipps, who

## BEHIND THE THRONE

also gave valuable help in the success of the Great Exhibition; of all his plans this was the most strongly attacked, and it was his greatest achievement. Phipps often represented his chief in the numerous committees and still more numerous meetings. The Prince, inclined to move outside the narrow limits of the Court – an inclination against which the Queen fought most strenuously – was watched most carefully by the very cautious Sir Charles in order that he should give himself away as little as possible and so remain unexposed to false judgment or criticism. He at once drew attention to it when at the meetings preceding the Exhibition the name of the Prince was, in his opinion, misused in an unduly advertising manner, and considered it out of place to hear the Prince's praises, 'however just, so loudly sounded . . . one mischievous person in even the best disposed meeting, might make this a foundation for much that would be disadvantageous to the plan and disagreeable to Your Royal Highness.' Albert completely concurred in Phipps's view: 'Praising me at meetings looks as if I were to be advertised and used as a means of drawing a full house.'

In the social pursuits of the Prince also it was again Phipps who, among all the collaborators, showed the greatest understanding. There were four main points which again and again occupied their attention with the object of 'the improvement of the working classes (so called).' Having regard to the present work in this direction, which again finds the most active support in a member of the Royal House, they deserve special note: 'Education of the children with industrial training – improvement of dwellings – grant of allotments with the cottages – Savings Bank and Benefit Societies (if possible managed by themselves), particularly on sound economic principles.' But the Prince and his collaborator were only allowed to participate to a very modest extent in the carrying out of these plans.

Phipps was most sincerely devoted to his chief; on the fifteenth anniversary of the Queen's wedding he wrote to

her: '... Colonel Phipps believes, not from his heart merely, but from more sober experience and matured judgment, that it is perfectly impossible to estimate the value of His R.H. as Consort to Your Majesty.' The esteem was mutual, and Phipps had the pleasure during his lifetime of receiving an acceptable proof of it; when his daughter married Captain Frederick Sayer – 'that handsome lame young officer,' as the Queen said of the bridegroom – the wedding was allowed to take place in St. George's Chapel, Windsor, 'which is very seldom the case.'

It belonged to his office that the most public appearances of Phipps took place when, on the occasion of a change of Government, negotiations had to be conducted on behalf of the Queen with the outgoing and the incoming Ministers. The dismissal of Palmerston, however, and the circumstances attending the same, involved Phipps in a special manner, and for a short moment he took part in the excitements – and probably also the intrigues – of foreign politics. After Napoleon's *coup d'état* which led to the Second Empire, Palmerston, without any discussion with his colleagues in the Cabinet, had, in a conversation with the French Ambassador in London, Walewski, recognised the new Government in France. But not only Russell, the Prime Minister, and the Queen, but also Normanby, the English Ambassador in Paris, who at no time was on particularly good terms with his immediate superior at the Foreign Office, had different views. Normanby now had especial reasons to complain of his chief, for when he attempted at the Ministère des Affaires Étrangères solemnly to express the neutrality of his country, he learnt to his amazement, and not until then, that Palmerston had a somewhat different view, and had already expressed the same officially. Not without justification did the Ambassador feel that he had been made a fool of. The road to a complaint about the inconsiderate superior was open. Letters were drawn up in Paris and sent to the Prince's Private Secretary. Placing letters from the English

## BEHIND THE THRONE

Embassy before the Queen was part of Phipps's work, but some of the complaints were addressed to him personally – 'Dear Charles' and 'My dearest Charles' – and in due foresight they were not signed by the Ambassador but by Lady Normanby. The question remains whether the letters would have been sent at all had there not been so good a go-between, with such clear judgment, and one to whose discretion it could have been left to pass the complaints on – or keep them back. But, things in Windsor being as they were, the complaint was bound to be welcome, and assuredly it was placed before the Queen at the proper moment by Phipps – Normanby's brother! Thus the Private Secretary indirectly assisted in at least expediting Palmerston's fall. But the episode did not prevent an unprejudiced official intercourse between Phipps and Palmerston when he became Prime Minister.

Like all other Private Secretaries, Phipps was often called in to perform less political tasks; he was credited with quite especial powers of judgment in questions of propriety, and once was entrusted with the important mission of visiting a puppet theatre in order to find out whether Her Majesty might be present at a performance. Phipps felt compelled, perhaps much to Victoria's regret, to answer in the negative; 'he feels quite certain not only that it would not be a suitable theatre for Your Majesty to visit, but that Your Majesty would derive no amusement from it.'

When it was necessary to induce the now languid Prince Consort to take better care of himself, the tactful and discreet assistance of the Secretary was called in. The Queen had noticed with great anxiety that the Prince's health, never too strong, was getting worse, and that he worked too hard. The many journeys from Windsor to London – 'he never has gone so often as he has done this year, even after the longest absence' – gave the worried wife an opportunity of turning to Sir Charles and begging him to do everything 'that the Prince would not be called



CHARLES PHIPPS

*Pencil drawing after a photograph by* VERNON HEATH



upon in the same way for some time.' Phipps at once replied: 'He can with the greatest sincerity assure Your Majesty, that not even Your Majesty can be more anxious to save the Prince from unnecessary business. The health of the Prince is indeed of an importance that cannot be overrated; and it has been Sir C. Phipps's study for many years to assist and lighten the business which in such an endless variety of shapes comes before His Royal Highness.' But by now it was probably too late.

When the dark hour came for the Royal House, Palmerston stood at the head of the Government; at this moment all his former animosity for the Prince was forgotten and buried. Himself confined to bed, he was in constant touch with Phipps, to whom sometimes three letters a day, full of anxiety and sorrow, went from London to Windsor. Palmerston urges that other doctors should be called in; 'one can only hope that Providence may yet spare us so overwhelming a calamity.' In the hour of death Sir Charles and General Grey stood by the bedside of their master.

Of the many obituary notices and speeches, the speech of Disraeli in the House of Commons was amongst those which made the strongest impression on the widow, who expressed her 'grateful sense' for the appreciation, 'as elegant in the language employed as any of those beautiful glorious orations.' Through Phipps, Disraeli assured the Queen: 'what I attempted to express, I deeply felt.'

After the great bereavement, Phipps entered the Queen's service; he did not live to obtain the official appointment as her Private Secretary however; precedent, 'that musty mother of mischief,' did not grant it him.

The extraordinary esteem which Sir Charles enjoyed from the Queen is shown strikingly by the fact that Victoria was so deeply affected by the death of this faithful man that she had a Court postponed by a week. His services were honoured by a solemn funeral at Windsor. The body was brought from St. James's Palace by the Great Western



## BEHIND THE THRONE

Railway and conveyed to King Henry III's Tower, the Windsor residence of the deceased. Headed by the Prince of Wales, the Court and the whole household followed the coffin to St. George's Chapel. Before the coffin was sealed up in the narrow recess, Biddulph brought magnificent wreaths as the last greeting of the grateful Queen.

## CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE

SIR CHARLES BEAUMONT PHIPPS, K.C.B., 1801-1866

Son of the first Earl of Mulgrave, Viscount Normanby.  
Harrow.

- 1820      Entered the Army.
- 1832-34   Private Secretary to his brother, Lord Normanby,  
            Governor of Jamaica.
- 1835      Lord Normanby Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland.
- 1835-39   Lieutenant-Colonel.
- 1835      Married Mary Anne Bathurst.
- 1841      Daughter, Maria Henrietta Sophia, born. (1862, Maid  
            of Honour; 1889, Woman of the Bedchamber.)
- 1844      Son born. (1853-60, Page of Honour; 1876-79,  
            Groom in Waiting.)
- 1846      Equerry to Queen Victoria.
- 1847      As Lieutenant-Colonel on half-pay, Private Secretary of  
            Prince Albert.
- 1849      Treasurer of Prince Albert.
- 1851      Resigned from the Army.  
            The Great Exhibition.  
            Palmerston's dismissal.
- 1858      K.C.B.
- 1862      Receiver-General of the Duchy of Cornwall.

In the Court Circular of March 3rd, 1866, it is stated that his untiring zeal in the Queen's service was 'most highly appreciated by the Queen and Prince Consort.'



## ARTHUR HELPS



## ARTHUR HELPS

THE offices of the Privy Council, a department in which the demands of daily toil were not too exacting, enjoyed in the sixties a literary reputation. Henry Reeve was the Registrar of the Privy Court of Appeal and the editor of the *Edinburgh Review*, after having had to leave *The Times* owing to a somewhat injudicious article on the marriage of the Princess Royal. The Registrar of the Clergy Ritus was the Rev. William Harness, who was much esteemed as a brilliant writer, and still more for having been a friend of Byron; he had published a large number of books dealing with literature, education, and Christianity. He was very lame, and it was said that Byron's partiality for him may perhaps to some extent have been due to this similarity of affliction. The Clerk of the Council was Arthur Helps, *bel esprit*, æsthete, and author.

Starting his official career as secretary to Spring-Rice (afterwards Lord Monteagle), who was then Chancellor of the Exchequer in Melbourne's Ministry, his official experience was interrupted for twenty years by the fall of the Melbourne Administration. Incidentally, he had already published a large number of highly distinguished works. The first Spanish discoveries in South America had attracted his creative imagination, and led him to descriptions of the great *Conquistadores*. But his later productivity was not confined to historical gleanings; in the sphere of pure literature also he developed great activity, and he even attempted an important *roman à clef*, *Realmah*. Although Ruskin praised Helps's 'beautiful quiet English,' yet, in spite of that recognition, nothing from any of these works has come down to posterity. Helps, although a fine thinker and

## BEHIND THE THRONE

highly cultured, was, like many of his generation, a prolix writer. He belonged to those who find writing easy, who experience no trouble in putting a thought into stylistic form; such highly gifted word-artists are only too inclined, even before they have thought an idea out, to take up the pen, which then runs away with them. His house at Vernon Hill – named after Admiral Vernon, of Portobello fame, who had formerly lived there – was the meeting-place of a select circle of scientists and men of letters; Carlyle, Emerson, Kingsley, Theodore Martin, and George Lewes, the biographer of Goethe, were friends of the hospitable master of the house who, inspired by the lively discussions at these gatherings, wrote *Friends in Council*, a title a little too reminiscent of his official activities; these social essays are the author's only work which achieved any lasting popularity.

It would be an exaggeration to say that authorship enjoyed any special consideration at the Royal Court; the interest which the Queen took in the literature of her day was not particularly extensive. Towards Tennyson she felt a certain attraction; his *In Memoriam* gave her comfort and solace in her great sorrow. Of Dickens, Scott, and George Eliot she had read a certain amount, but without any special enthusiasm for the works or their authors. The advent into her closer *entourage* of Arthur Helps, a man who not only was very well informed, but also knew how to communicate his ideas and to influence others, was bound greatly to affect the Queen's literary taste. Helps, together with Dean Stanley and his wife Lady Augusta,<sup>1</sup> opened up the Queen's mind and taste to contemporary production. She made the acquaintance of Carlyle, whom she found 'gruff-tempered, if not unmannerly,' whilst he was charmed with his Sovereign: 'It is impossible to imagine a politer little woman; nothing the least imperious; all gentle, all sincere.' Grote the historian, Browning the poet, came into the orbit of the Queen. But Helps did more; under his careful guidance

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix I.

## ARTHUR HELPS

and direction Victoria herself took up the pen and became an author.

With Albert the connection did not last long, but it was sufficient to enable Helps to recognise in him an 'ideal Prince.' After the great bereavement it required especial care and tact on the part of Helps to get through the first meeting of the Council at all. He had 'well and kindly arranged' everything. Only the Duke of Newcastle and Sir George Grey (both Secretaries of State), Lord Granville, and Helps met in Albert's former study, the doors to the adjoining room standing open; from here the Queen listened without being seen and without herself saying a word. The Royal Assent, the word 'Approved,' was spoken by Helps. As the Queen was 'very nervous and anxious' and could only read with 'a trembling voice,' the declaration of the Prince of Wales's marriage had been prepared by Helps in such a way that Victoria had to exert herself only very little.

In her great sorrow the Queen found solace and relief in the desire to keep the remembrance of her loved one alive, to create something permanent and visible which should outlast death. Not only were monuments to be erected, the thoughts and words of the departed were to be preserved for posterity, especially those 'admirable memoranda' which, in the bereaved Sovereign's opinion, 'are gospels now.' Arthur Helps was the right man to advise and assist the Queen in these plans. Even before more extensive schemes had been considered, Helps edited for Her Majesty a collection of the Prince's *Speeches and Addresses*, and wrote a preface for that collection in the details of which the Queen showed the greatest interest. The description of the personality, the style, the adroit and practised pen, leave no doubt that Helps was the author, whilst the Queen and Phipps merely supplied the material. In spite of this, Helps writes to Lady Augusta Bruce (afterwards the wife of Dean Stanley), 'I do not think anybody knows (not



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General Grey, nor yourself, nor even the Queen) how much it is Her Majesty's. And I should like you to know.' Assuredly that letter was not written so that Lady Augusta 'should know'; not the addressee was to be informed of his thought, but a much more important person – the Queen. Very many of the written remarks which are exchanged by those belonging to the Court or standing close to it are in a deeper sense neither written by him who holds the pen nor intended for him to whose name they are addressed. Behind the writer and the recipient stands the same invisible power – that of the master, the Sovereign. The self-effacement of the persons who think for the Queen and who advise her, the subordination of their own personalities, goes so far in some cases that we receive the peculiar, almost mystic impression that speaker and addressee are identical, that the Queen exchanges thoughts with herself through the intermediary of a third party. All the powers behind the Throne meet and unite in a collective power. Thus the final aim and the ideal of 'collaboration' in the widest sense are achieved.

The *Speeches*, produced in intimate collaboration by the Queen and Helps, were sent to Disraeli, bound in white morocco, and on the fly-leaf, in the Queen's handwriting, the inscription, 'To the Right Honourable Benjamin Disraeli, in recollection of the greatest and best of men, from the beloved Prince's broken-hearted widow Victoria R.' The man thus honoured was not wrong when, on informing his friend, Mrs. Brydges Willyams, of this dedication, he added, 'I think you will agree with me, that this is the most remarkable inscription which a Sovereign ever placed in a volume graciously presented to a subject!' His gratitude for the 'inestimable volume' he expresses in a letter for the composition of which he used the winged goose-quill of the poet and not the prosaic steel pen of the statesman: 'There was in Prince Albert an union of manly grace and sublime simplicity, of chivalry with the intellectual

splendour of the Attic Academe,' and he prophesies that a time will come when 'his plans will become systems, his suggestions dogmas, and the name of Albert will be accepted as the master-type of a generation of profounder feeling and vaster range than that which he formed and guided with benignant power.' When a poet strikes such chords, it would be expecting too much to think that his prophecies should be fulfilled. The main thing was that the Queen was convinced by Disraeli's 'somewhat hyperbolic eulogium' and his predictions. Disraeli's letter was sent to Helps through Augusta Bruce (Lady Augusta Stanley): 'The Queen knows with what peculiar interest you will read anything from the pen of Mr. Disraeli on the subject which so engrosses Her Majesty; but, independently of this, the Queen has been anxious that you should have an opportunity of perusing the most striking and beautiful letter that Her Majesty has received. . . . I need not tell you how Her Majesty has been affected by the depth and delicacy of these touches . . .' and as this description of feelings, passed on by Lady Augusta to Arthur Helps, is reproduced in Buckle's book on Disraeli, it may without demur be assumed that at the time it was at once communicated to Disraeli. Thus the circle was complete!

And the first literary relations between the Queen and her author-statesman were begun, relations which were crowned, when the *Leaves* appeared, by Disraeli's 'Your Majesty is the head of the literary profession,' and by the designedly casual 'We authors, Ma'am.' And yet Disraeli was no courtier in the ordinary sense of the word, either by birth or by education. He was a courtier by virtue of his genius.

Helps, who was never in the immediate service of the Queen, became, far beyond the compass of his official position, the adviser of the Queen in private and personal affairs, especially in literary matters, for which she had developed a momentary taste. When it was decided to

publish the *Leaves from a Journal of our Life in the Highlands*, it was again Helps who had to guide the pen of the Royal author. Things did not always go quite smoothly, 'and often Helps "scolded" her for the colloquial inaccuracy of her style. He never failed to draw the Queen's attention to faults of this nature when a draft was submitted to him for correction. On one occasion, when he was ill, Victoria wrote to him, "The Queen is so grieved (perhaps Mr. Helps will scold her for that so!) to hear of Mr. Helps feeling so ill to-day." But her faults of composition were ineradicable.' Perhaps the Queen was right when she assumed that it was the simplicity of the style and the absence of all appearance of writing for effect which had given her book such immense and unreserved success. 'Besides, how could Mr. Helps expect pains to be taken when she wrote late at night, suffering from headache and exhaustion, and in dreadful haste and not for publication.' Not all circles were equally enthusiastic about the 'modest and unassuming' publication; ironical criticisms were not lacking, and *Punch* suggested that 'the trait that seems to be the most prominent in Her Majesty's book is the tea-tray.' All the same, the literary associates, the Queen and her mentor, had every reason to be entirely satisfied, and the book proved to be a success from the selling side also.

This time it was Helps who sent the offspring of his and the Queen's pen to his great colleague; Disraeli assured him that he had at once 'read the book last night with unaffected interest. Its vein is so innocent and vivid, happy in picture and touched with what I ever think is the characteristic of our Royal mistress—grace. There is a freshness and fragrance about the book like the heather amid which it was written. They say that truth and tact are not easily combined: I never believed so; and you have proved the contrary; for you have combined them in your preface, and that's why I like it.' It would hardly have been possible to thank author and editor, dilettante and expert, master

and servant, in the same letter in more suitable terms. There is no need to worry about it: Helps has most assuredly laid the letter before the Queen, and again the circle is closed.

A man like Helps must have felt particularly attracted to Disraeli, and he often stopped at Hughenden on the way to and from Balmoral, Disraeli, much flattered, looking upon this as 'a Royal reconnaissance.' They kept up an intermittent correspondence which was completely outside politics. Thus Disraeli on one occasion reports that at a luncheon-party at Vernon Hill he had as companions Jowett - 'does not look like a man who could devise or destroy a creed, but benignant' - Max Mueller - 'all fire' - and Ruskin - 'all fantasy.'

Towards a man like Gladstone, Helps had less sympathy. 'Amongst the foremost men in politics there is hardly any one with whom I have hitherto sympathised less than I have with Mr. Gladstone'; but, all the same, Helps also had to acknowledge the 'nobility of his nature, his ardent desire for right and justice.' And he did not even know that it was Gladstone who proposed to the Queen to give him the K.C.B.; 'in making this recommendation, Mr. Gladstone has special regard to the marks of confidence with which Mr. Helps has been honoured by Your Majesty. Mr. Helps is not aware of this submission.' And, as far as can be ascertained, Gladstone was not presented with any of the books with personal dedication!

In the meantime, Helps's attempts to keep up the Queen's interest in the great writers of her epoch had not ceased. At his instigation, Dickens had lent the Queen his collection of pictures from the American Civil War; and it was the return of these, together with the wish to express her thanks personally, which brought about the invitation to Buckingham Palace of the greatest novelist of the Victorian age. Only to Helps's *mise en scène* was it due that 'Mr. Dickens, the celebrated author,' had the honour of being presented to

his Queen. The hostess asked the novelist to give her some of his books, and in return she handed him her *Leaves*, with the inscription, 'From the humblest of writers to one of the greatest.'

Helps's brilliant mastery over his pen was again and again called in in the service of some matter or other where 'his beautiful quiet English' was so urgently needed and so well appreciated. After the publication of Albert's *Speeches* he developed into a specialist for 'In Memoriam' notices. Palmerston, Clarendon, Dickens, Kingsley – for each of these he wrote the official obituary. When someone died, Helps felt at once that 'now I am as certain to be called in as the undertaker.' He it was, also, who drew up the much-discussed paragraph<sup>1</sup> which appeared anonymously in the *Daily Telegraph*, denying on authority 'that there was a single word of truth' in the rumours that the Prince of Wales had an enormous load of debts, which some circles were able to state quite definitely as amounting to £600,000. A great service Helps rendered the Queen when he suggested to her that Theodore Martin, the historian, should be entrusted with that prodigious work, 'the life of the Prince Consort.' Martin had grave doubts about starting on the extraordinarily extensive and responsible task. Not until the Queen had assured him that 'the responsibility for what should be put in or omitted would rest with the Queen, General Grey, and Mr. Helps' did he say, and then unreservedly, that he was prepared to undertake the work; he expressly refused any remuneration. Martin's work is a monument erected by love to the deceased Prince; admiration gave the incentive to its erection, and admiration was to be called forth by it. Perhaps it was posthumously to wipe out some part of the debt, payment of which Albert would have liked to receive during his life. A critical appreciation could not be looked for in Martin's work.

After some initial tension, Helps had achieved quite a

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix 2.

good understanding with Henry Reeve,<sup>1</sup> his subordinate collaborator on the Privy Council. Reeve, longer in office, had felt hurt by the appointment of Helps, for he thought that he had a reversionary right to the higher post. But he soon got over it and was quite satisfied, 'as I continued to hold an easier office, and eventually obtained the same income without the annoyance of attending the Court.' With this official Charles Cavendish Fulke Greville, his former chief at the Privy Council, had made, a few hours before his death, an important deposit – he had entrusted him with the publication of his memoranda and the diaries. Their publication acted as a bombshell. 'It is as if Judas Iscariot wrote the private lives of the Apostles,' declared Lord Winchilsea. The Queen was beside herself about 'that horrible book'; she 'hopes and wishes Mr. Reeve will and should know what she thinks of such conduct'; and to Helps fell the task officially to inform the editor 'how horrified and indignant' the Sovereign was over 'this dreadful and really scandalous book.' The Queen had three main objections: 'that the book was disparaging to her family'; 'that it tended to weaken Monarchy'; 'that it proceeded from official persons'; and Helps read over the chief passages of the letter he had received from the Queen to the editor, who was charged with 'having degraded Royalty.' 'Not at all,' rejoined Reeve; 'it elevates it, by the contrast it offers between the present and the defunct state of affairs.' Through Helps, Reeve replied with his humble duty that owing to the 'depravity' of George IV and the 'absurdity' of William IV the Monarchy had fallen into disrepute, but that under Victoria it had become 'stronger than ever.' But the Royal anger was not to be appeased. The K.C.B., to which his services entitled Reeve, was withheld from him. Apart from those passages which the Queen resented as offensive, there was one particular paragraph which horrified Helps personally and which he considered as 'the most atrocious.' Greville

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix 3.

## BEHIND THE THRONE

calls on Melbourne, and 'after much political discussion, takes his leave; but as he goes, he sees a valet sweeping away a *bonnet* and a *shawl*'; these words being underlined in the original. 'Now, it might have been a virtuous bonnet and a chaste shawl, but, whether or not, what a piece of treachery it is to commemorate one's observations in such a case. And this man was supposed to be a particularly fine gentleman.'

Helps in particular must have felt the publication of the memoirs of Charles Greville, a former Clerk of the Council, and so his predecessor in office, as an especially serious breach of confidence, the more so as they were edited by a man with whom he was in constant official touch. Such a publication, and the breach of loyalty entailed thereby, must have seemed to him the more incomprehensible, as he himself was most punctilious in regard to his duties towards the Sovereign; he knew how much confidence was reposed in him, and he knew how to keep it. From him no surprises could come, either during his lifetime or later. 'There will be no papers found after my death, no diaries. . . . I resolved from the first that there should be an instance of a man who saw and heard much that was deeply interesting, but private, and who could hold his tongue and restrain his pen for ever.' With the expression of this view Helps reaches the rank of an ideal helper and adviser far beyond all personal considerations.

Helps was a sociable man, fond of friends and society; at Sandringham he was a very welcome guest who could take his part in conversation. A great animal-lover, he did not find much pleasure in hunting, and on one occasion wrote very humorously to General Knollys, 'In the great case of Huntsman *versus* Fox I am always on the side of the defendant.'

This good-tempered and ideally minded man had during the latter part of his life to contend with serious financial difficulties. It was bad luck for him that clay was found on



ARTHUR HELPS

*Vanity Fair*





## ARTHUR HELPS

the estate which served him as a place for rest and literary labour. Now he imagined, with his sanguine temperament, that he would be able to carry through in practice what had long been a cherished ideal – to show the right relation between capital and labour. But the theorist, the writer of high-minded economic essays, was sadly disappointed in practice. He had invested nearly all his capital in a company formed by him, and everything was lost. He was compelled to part with his estate in Hampshire, and gratefully accepted the house in Kew Gardens which the Queen offered him.

He died in harness; he caught cold in attending a levee, complications set in, and Helps died at the age of only sixty-two.

The sorrow of the Queen at the passing away 'of a most valued, devoted, faithful, and discreet friend' was deep. Through 'dear Sir Arthur' she had made the acquaintance of Theodore Martin, who was at once called in so that the Queen might discuss everything 'connected with our kind friend.' 'She will for ever remain deeply grateful for his great kindness and cherish his memory for ever.' The Prince of Wales also sent a message of deep sympathy. 'There is no one for whom I entertained a greater regard, and I may say affection. His advice was of the greatest value to me.'

But the mental atmosphere which Helps had created did not last long. Without living guidance the Queen's interest in literary works and writers was not strong enough, and soon died out. How neglected her relations with literature and science were in later years appears strikingly from the fact that at the manifold festivities on the occasion of the first Jubilee neither Browning nor Huxley nor Arnold received any kind of invitation. And yet these three belonged, each on his own ground, to the ornaments of the later Victorian age.

## CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE

SIR ARTHUR HELPS, K.C.B., D.C.L., 1813-1875

- 1835-39 Private Secretary to Spring-Rice (afterwards Lord Monteagle), Chancellor of the Exchequer.
- 1839-41 Private Secretary to Lord Morpeth (afterwards Earl of Carlisle), Chief Secretary for Ireland.
- 1860 Clerk of the Council.
- 1862 Publication of the *Speeches*.
- 1864 Hon. degree of D.C.L., University of Oxford.
- 1868 Publication of the *Leaves*.
- 1869 Publication of *Mountain, Loch, and Glen*.
- 1870 Dickens visits the Queen in Buckingham Palace.
- 1871 C.B.
- 1872 K.C.B.
- 1874 Denial of the load of debt of the Prince of Wales appears on September 17th, 1874, in the *Daily Telegraph*.
- 1875 First part of the *Greville Memoirs* published by Henry Reeve.

Sir Arthur was married to Bissel Fuller, d. of Captain Edward Fuller; 1875, a pension of £200 was granted to her in consequence of her husband's public services.

## THE WORKS OF ARTHUR HELPS

- 1835 *Thoughts in the Cloister and the Crowd*.
- 1841 *Written in the Intervals of Business*.
- 1843 *King Henry II* (play).  
*Catherine Douglas* (play).
- 1844 *Claims of Labour* (an essay on the duties of employers to the employed).

## ARTHUR HELPS

- 1848 *Conquerors of the New World and their Bondsmen.*
- 1855, 57, 61 *Spanish Conquest in America* (4 vols.).
- 1858 *Oulita the Cerf.*
- 1859 *Friends in Council.*
- 1862 *Organisation in Daily Life.*
- 1868 *Las Casas.*  
*Realmah.*
- 1869 *Columbus.*  
*Pizarro.*
- 1870 *Casimir Maremma.*
- 1871 *Conversations on War and General Culture.*  
*Brevia* (short essays)
- 1872 *Thoughts upon Government.*  
*Thomas Brassey.*
- 1873 *Animals and their Masters.*
- 1874 *Ivan de Biron.*
- 1875 *Social Pressure.*

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## APPENDIX I

LADY AUGUSTA FREDERICA ELIZABETH STANLEY, 1822-1876

Lady Augusta Bruce was the daughter of the 7th Earl of Elgin and the sister of General Bruce, tutor of Albert Edward, Prince of Wales.

- 1861 Resident Woman of the Bedchamber.
- 1863 Married Arthur Penrhyn Stanley, D.D., Dean of Westminster.
- 1863 Extra Woman of the Bedchamber.

The following notice appeared after her death in the Court Circular: 'Her social qualities endeared her to the Queen and to the whole Royal Family in no ordinary manner, as they did to a very numerous circle of friends of all classes; and her talents were not unworthy of the distinguished family to which she belonged, of which so many members have been prematurely cut off.'

## BEHIND THE THRONE

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### APPENDIX 2

‘Various reports have lately appeared in print to the effect that debts have been contracted by the Prince of Wales. It has been stated that Mr. Gladstone was requested to bring the matter before Parliament, but declined; that Mr. Disraeli was to be asked to do so; and, finally, that Her Majesty had paid off these amounts. Mr. P. A. Taylor, the member for Leicester, has even addressed his constituents on the subject. We are enabled to assert that there is not a single word of truth in any of the above statements.’ – *Daily Telegraph*, September 17th, 1874.

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### APPENDIX 3

HENRY REEVE, 1813–1895

- 1829 Studied in Geneva.  
Extended travels in Europe.
- 1837 Clerk of Appeal and then Registrar at the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council.
- 1840–55 Wrote for *The Times*.
- 1855 Editor of the *Edinburgh Review*, to which his father, a well-known Whig physician and writer of Norwich, had been one of the earliest contributors.
- 1869 D.C.L., Oxford University.
- 1871 C.B.
- 1875, 85, 87 *Greville Memoirs* published.

# THOMAS BIDDULPH



## THOMAS BIDDULPH

ONE of the last services which Stockmar was able to render to his Royal pupil and master was to secure a successor for Sir George Bowles, Master of the Household, who, owing to failing health, found himself compelled to resign his office. (He was too pessimistic; he lived another twenty-five years in retirement, and died at the age of ninety.) The indefatigable doctor, who in addition was about this time taking an active part in the negotiations about a tutor for the Prince of Wales to succeed Mr. Birch, had suggested Major Biddulph to succeed Bowles. Prince Albert was favourably impressed by him, and as 'he is highly spoken of on all sides,' he was taken into the service of the Court, at first solely as administrative official. But even later on, when his abilities found a wider field of activity and he belonged to the inner advising staff, he remained in the background. In spite of the many and important tasks which fell to him, and in spite of his especial position – the Queen called him 'valued servant and friend' – he never stepped into the limelight. His first years as Master of the Household brought him into frequent contact with the Prince, and not always did their views coincide, thus occasionally giving rise to dissensions. Biddulph, critical by nature, was not so easily convinced as some of his colleagues. But in the end he too was unable to resist Albert's decided and yet conciliating manner. ('His view of the case might not be the same as yours; still, he listened so patiently to your objections, and so clearly explained his reasons for disagreeing, that it was impossible, even if you were not quite convinced, not to wish to carry into effect what was put before you so forcibly and yet so pleasantly.')



## BEHIND THE THRONE

When General Bruce, the mentor of the young Albert Edward, had 'gone so soon to join her beloved Prince,' Biddulph (in the meantime promoted Colonel) was called in, together with Phipps and General Grey, 'to act in turn for the lamented General, and later the Queen will take good care to make such selection as would meet her beloved husband's wishes.' (The successor of Bruce was General Sir William Knollys, whose son Francis was the lifelong friend and Private Secretary of Edward VII.)

Simultaneously with General Grey's appointment as Private Secretary, 'Bids,' as he was often jokingly called in intimate Court circles, was gazetted Keeper of H.M. Privy Purse. Shortly before his death he was sworn in as Privy Councillor.

In his life of the Prince Consort, Martin, at the instigation of the Queen, has raised a memorial to Biddulph: 'He was the last survivor of the three able men – Sir Charles Phipps and General Charles Grey being the other two – who had been intimately associated with the Prince from their position as leading members of Her Majesty's Household, and who continued to serve their Royal mistress with generous devotion, until one by one they followed "beyond the shadow of our night" the Prince, whom they loved so well.'

With Biddulph the generation of Stockmar died out.

## CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE

THE RIGHT HON. GENERAL SIR THOMAS MYDDLETON BIDDULPH  
P.C., K.C.B., 1809-1878

- 1825      Entered the Army as Cornet.
- 1829      Lieutenant.
- 1851-66   Master of the Queen's Household.
- 1851-78   Extra Equerry.
- 1854      Colonel.
- 1857      Married Hon. Mary Seymour. (1850-56, Maid of Honour; 1857, Hon. Woman of the Bedchamber; 1875-96, Lady in Waiting to Princess Beatrice of Battenberg.)
- 1860      Son, Victor Alexander Frederick Myddleton, born. Baptised in the Chapel of Buckingham Palace, H. M. being a sponsor. (1871-78, Page of Honour.)
- 1863      K.C.B.
- 1866      Joint Keeper of the Privy Purse.
- 1867-78   Sole Keeper of the Privy Purse.
- 1873      Lieutenant-General.
- 1877      Brevet-General and Privy Councillor.

In the Court Circular of October 5th, 1878, it is stated that his death 'caused the Queen the profoundest grief. He had been for twenty-seven years one of the Queen's most valued and confidential servants, and his death is felt by Her Majesty as an irreparable loss.'



# GENERAL GREY



## GENERAL GREY

YOUNG CHARLES, who had already reached the rank of Colonel before he was thirty, also wanted to become M.P.; in a scion of the great Whig family of Grey of Fallodon this ambition was justifiable. In the small borough for which he stood he met an opponent who came from quite different surroundings. There politics had as yet played no part at all, and officers were not amongst the daily guests. Books, however, had issued from that house; on the part of the father, scientific and exact; on the part of the son, novels where the men, somewhat dandified like himself, liked to move among the nobility. When in one of these novels the son had described in great detail an earl and his mode of life, the critical father observed, with a shrug of the shoulders, 'The boy has not in the whole of his life seen anything like an earl.' But the youthful Colonel had seen very many earls; his father himself happened to be one, and, in addition, Prime Minister – 'the Reform Bill Grey.' With such backing the son could hardly fail. To the beaten opponent we are indebted, however, for a description of the election which is as amusing and lively as it is unreliable: 'Yesterday the Treasury sent down Colonel Grey with a hired mob and a band. Never was such a failure. After parading the town with his paid voices, he made a stammering speech of ten minutes from his phaeton. . . . Feeling it was the crisis, I jumped up on the portico of the Red Lion and gave it them for an hour and a quarter. I can give you no idea of the effect. I made them all mad. A great many absolutely cried. . . . The Colonel returned to town in the evening absolutely astounded out of his presence of mind, *on dit* never to appear again. If he comes, I am prepared for

## BEHIND THE THRONE

him.' These preparations, however, must have been quite ineffective, for, when Grey did come again, he was elected. The beaten opponent tries to explain the defeat by saying that 'had I let money fly I should have come in,' and his prophecy, 'I make no doubt of success another time,' was, for the time being, also mistaken. Not till five years later did he reach the goal at last. For both candidates the thirty-third year of their lives was full of meaning. Charles Grey abandoned the Parliamentary career, for him but a short interlude, and almost at the moment of her accession entered the service of the Queen. The other was at last elected, and for forty-one years Benjamin Disraeli was able to write M.P. after his name.

A generation later it was Grey who had the task of conducting the negotiations preliminary to Disraeli's first Ministry. For this reason the Parliamentary fight in Buckinghamshire, carried on two miles from Hughenden and five from Beaconsfield, belongs to those good jokes which history unfortunately but too seldom indulges in.

A rapid career in the Army, for a time member of the House of Commons, Private Secretary to his father during the latter's tenure of office as Prime Minister, and thus in a position to become acquainted also with the secret paths of politics – it is hardly possible to imagine a better preparation for a Private Secretary of a Sovereign, and Grey was in fact subsequently called to this office; first, as the successor of Anson, to Prince Albert; later to the Queen. But at the moment the appointment of the son of a great political associate and predecessor in office at Downing Street to the Royal *entourage* was one of Melbourne's typical acts of patronage. In view of the Whig tradition and of his own active political work, Grey must subsequently have found it peculiarly difficult to pass through the 'purification process' which cleanses the advisers of the Sovereign from all political alloy; but he also made the attempt to forget his political past.

## GENERAL GREY

Already, before Albert's marriage, Charles Grey had come into closer touch with him. On the occasion of the second visit of the two Coburg Princes (Ernest had come over with his brother), Grey had been attached to the suite of the visitors, and could say from his own association that 'the three years which had passed since the Princes were last in England had greatly improved their personal appearance.' Grey finds Albert 'eminently handsome'; the Queen, however, thought her cousin 'very fascinating,' and this judgment was probably decisive, and dispersed any doubts which might still have existed. Together with Lord Torrington,<sup>1</sup> Grey went to Gotha on a special mission to invest the youthful future Consort with the Order of the Garter and to escort him to England for the wedding. From then onward until the death of the Prince, Grey was constantly with him and entrusted with the most varied tasks. Thus he was one of the bearers of the written answer to the intimation of the Emperor Alexander's accession to the Throne, and on his return from Russia he visited the aged Stockmar at Coburg. When the Prince of Wales was sent on that tour of which no one rightly knows whether it was a punitive expedition with the object of forcing the young fellow to write letters and keep a diary, or an educative journey to make him acquainted with foreign countries, Grey also was for a short time one of the far too many<sup>2</sup> who were to exhort the fifteen-year-old Prince, influence him, educate him, and goodness knows what else.

In comparison, however, with his future tasks, these were all only unimportant occupations; after Albert's death it

<sup>1</sup> Thirty years later, when Russell handed over the conduct of affairs to Derby, the latter had political doubts as to whether he should leave Lord Torrington in office as Lord in Waiting. It necessitated Grey's intervention to secure Torrington remaining at Court, but on certain definite conditions.

<sup>2</sup> In the end the Prince's travelling companions, who became more and more numerous, consisted, in addition to the four Eton boys of the same age, of Tutor Gibbs, Instructor Tavern, Grey (subsequently replaced by General Sir William Codrington), Ponsonby, and Prince Ernest Leiningen, a son of the Queen's step-brother. As might have been expected, the journey was a complete failure.



## BEHIND THE THRONE

was Grey who advanced into the first line of advisers, and upon whom the Queen mainly relied during the next decade. Great as may have been the influence of other men, such, for instance, as that of Anson for a time – Stockmar is entirely *sui generis* and cannot be included – it is Grey, although his beginnings go back into the Albert-Stockmar era, who heads the line of the Great Private Secretaries.

Barely a month after the death of the Prince, Grey makes his first visible appearance as Private Secretary of the Queen; a letter to Palmerston begins: 'The Queen being much fatigued with many affairs of a private nature and being so weak and exhausted from her utter misery and desolation, makes use of General Grey's pen,' and the Royal diary remarks on that day: 'General Grey a little nervous at my asking him to write to Lord P. in my name, I signing the letter, but Uncle [King Leopold was staying in Osborne] and I reassured him.' A curious statement and an almost inexplicable occurrence! Grey had been at Court for five and twenty years – exactly as long as Victoria had been Queen; during twelve of those years he had, as Private Secretary of the Prince, written letters and signed them himself. Now he suddenly gets 'nervous,' although it is only a question of a letter the contents of which are of no importance whatever, and he is contributing nothing but his handwriting. Must it be assumed that Grey suddenly became less assured because for the first time he faced his Sovereign without her advising husband? That Leopold's authority should also have been called in seems still more peculiar. Had the Sovereign and her authority really during the course of the preceding few years disappeared in the shadow of the Coburgs?

In spite, however, of his pessimistic outlook on life, Grey did in time gain confidence – whether in his own judgment or in the orders of the Queen may be left an open question – and got rid of his nervousness. In the following year Victoria is already full of praise: 'I cannot tell you sufficiently



GENERAL GREY

*from a drawing by G. H. THOMAS*

*Rischgütz*



## GENERAL GREY

what a support and comfort good excellent General Grey is to me; his discretion, sense, and courage make him invaluable.'

But even the most intimate and reliable collaborators had to be careful in three particulars not to incur the Royal wrath, which sometimes found emphatic expression. The Queen did not desire that proposals should be submitted to her to take part in official functions; a brusque refusal awaited him who suggested to the August Lady that she should alter travelling arrangements which had been made, however urgent the reasons; and, in addition, she insisted that she was ill. The view that she had 'never had strong health' had to be maintained, and she expected her *entourage* to sympathise in all her great and little illnesses. Grey on one occasion transgressed against this, and informed the King of the Belgians that the Queen was 'in excellent health.' In the next letter the Uncle expressed his delight at this. Such a view had to be contradicted, a denial had to be issued, and in some excitement Victoria wrote to her Uncle, 'How good Grey could give you a good account of me is indeed marvellous, for I have been very unwell the whole time I have been home, and have hardly been a day free from headache and nervous pains, but this gentleman sees me only on business, and when I talk I get excited and flushed and very feverish, and that they call being well.' That Grey, in general the 'very able adviser and friend,' had to look forward to a very unpleasant quarter of an hour may be assumed with certainty.

Of these inclinations of the Queen, only one had become generally apparent – that the Queen was invisible. With all due allowances for the mourning of the August Lady, a growing discontent appeared gradually in all circles. People missed the festivities of former years; the lack of such events made itself felt in social life as well as in business. The Queen had given the example of a happy middle-class marriage, and now her widowhood also was

looked at from the sensible middle-class point of view; this was that even in a Royal Family a period of three years might be regarded as sufficient for the deepest mourning. The people wanted to see the Sovereign again, and they felt that they were entitled to do so. Just as in the case of any widow, it was demanded of the Royal Widow that she should resume her duties towards the living. *The Times* gave lively expression to this sentiment in an article which affected the Queen to an extraordinary extent. She felt not only hurt, but had the impression that she was deeply wronged. Grey had at once to get into communication with Delane, the editor, and a few days later there appeared in the columns of *The Times* an unsigned *communiqué*, inspired by the Queen, explaining that, 'while Her Majesty would meet the loyal wishes of her subjects as far as she could, the important and incessant duties of government, which she regularly performed, were as much as her impaired health could undertake, and that she could not undergo, in addition, the fatigue of State ceremonies, which could equally well be performed by other members of her family.' There is not the slightest indication that her advisers, at whose head Grey stood at that time, ever made any serious attempt to warn the Queen that her lack of understanding for popular feeling was bound to lead to a decrease in her popularity.

In other directions also Grey did not always advise the Queen rightly. In the Schleswig-Holstein question, a hobby-horse of the Prince Consort, his judgment was completely at fault. His letter to the Queen – 'General Grey begs, with his humble duty and most heartfelt congratulations, to return these letters to Your Majesty. It is, now, not only certain that peace will be preserved, but that the total separation of the Duchies, and the establishment of the Duke of Augustenburg as Duke of Schleswig-Holstein, is ensured' – has on every point been contradicted by events. Quite a number of people, in fact, did not have too high an

opinion of Grey, and 'some differences of opinion were held outside Court circles as to his tact and judgment.'

But other matters now occupied the attention of the Court; longer and shorter publications, the object of which was the glorification of the late Prince Consort, had begun to appear. Charles Grey had already published *Some Accounts of the Life and Opinions of Charles, second Earl Grey*, his father. He thus had some experience in writing history *pro domo*! Now there appeared, compiled under the direction of the Queen, *The Early Years of the Prince Consort*. Dr. Samuel Wilberforce, Bishop of Winchester, discussed the book in the *Quarterly Review*, and called it 'a cry from the Queen's heart for her people's sympathy,' and the excellent ecclesiastic and scholar expressed the view 'that her cry was answered.'

Although more than four years had passed since the death of the Prince, Grey had not yet been appointed Private Secretary to the Queen. Now the Queen turns reproachfully to her Prime Minister, Russell, and asks that at last 'General Grey's position should be a recognised one – as her Private Secretary. Every public man has one (the Prime Minister has two), and it is perfectly absurd to pretend that the Queen has none, when she has for the last four years been constantly obliged to use General Grey and poor Sir C. Phipps as her Secretaries. General Grey being now nearly twenty-nine years in her service, having been the Prince's Private Secretary for twelve years and acted as hers for more than four years – it is absolutely necessary that his position should now be recognised, as every year the Queen will require more help and assistance instead of less, and a new person can hardly be expected to understand the delicate and responsible task of communicating the Queen's wishes to her Ministers when she is unable to do so herself.' But Russell could not make up his mind to such an appointment, which might perhaps have entailed Constitutional discussions in Parliament. He suggested a

## BEHIND THE THRONE

compromise to the Queen: Grey was to be appointed Keeper of the Privy Purse. The Queen 'accepts the arrangement as proposed by Lord Russell, but she must say she would have been better satisfied, and thinks the public also would be better satisfied, if the honest course had been adopted by giving the proper name to the duties which it is admitted that General Grey or someone else must perform.' Not till a year later, under Derby's Ministry, was the actual appointment made, after the Prime Minister had written to Grey: 'Waiving the question of a salary altogether, about which there might be a difficulty, you wished to be recognised as the Queen's Private Secretary. I cannot but think the objection to the appointment the merest pedantry; and if H.M. desires that a notification of the appointment, subject to that understanding, should be inserted in the *Gazette*, I will give immediate directions for it.' Thus all difficulties were removed, and the notice of General Grey's appointment as Private Secretary to the Queen was duly gazetted. Grey had now been almost exactly thirty years in the Sovereign's service; for only three years was he allowed to fill the now recognised position.

Just about this time the Fenian Conspiracy started a new campaign of outrage in England. Two serious plots were carried out successfully – the rescue of two Fenian prisoners in Manchester by armed attack, and the blowing up of part of Clerkenwell Prison in London. The criminals, so far as it was possible to arrest them, were executed, and thereupon were at once consecrated as martyrs by Irish Nationalist feeling. These events, together with previously expressed threats against the Sovereign, were bound to cause the deepest anxiety to all responsible men around the Queen regarding her personal safety. Grey, with the Queen in Osborne, urgently drew his Royal mistress's attention to the extraordinary danger in such a lonely spot. 'He has shrunk, with a reluctance beyond words to express, from saying anything to alarm Your Majesty. . . . But in

what he said yesterday, he said perhaps less than he ought to have done; for he feels that, with a view to Your Majesty's safety, it is absolutely necessary that Your Majesty should be under no delusion as to the designs which are harboured against Your Majesty, or as to the peculiar facility which Osborne affords, in spite of the utmost watchfulness, for carrying them into execution.

'Crimes such as those contemplated cannot easily be perpetrated in crowded thoroughfares, or where there is a large population; and the most unsafe places for Your Majesty at this moment are those where the population is most thin and scattered. General Grey says this with much pain and reluctance, for he knows how it will jar against Your Majesty's feelings, and tend to disturb Your Majesty's comfort. But he would be utterly unworthy of the confidence Your Majesty has reposed in him, if he hesitated now, even at the risk of incurring Your Majesty's displeasure, in saying what he believes the care for Your Majesty's precious safety requires. . . . These clouds will, please God, pass away – but while alarm is so universally felt (General Grey wishes he could believe it to be without foundation), he would on his knees beseech Your Majesty to consider whether it would not be better for Your Majesty to be at Windsor. Perhaps he is going beyond his duty in making this representation to Your Majesty. But he could never know a moment's happiness, if anything occurred, and he had neglected, even, as he has said, at the risk of incurring Your Majesty's displeasure, to state his honest opinion as to the danger to which Your Majesty's is here exposed.' On the very same day the Queen replied, 'She is sorry to see General Grey so very much alarmed, though she knows well from what kind and devoted motives his anxiety springs; but she thinks, while every precaution should be taken here, as everywhere else (and she must repeat she thinks the danger far greater elsewhere), she thinks any panic or show of fear would be most injudicious as well as unnecessary. The



## BEHIND THE THRONE

Queen does not intend making any difference in her intention of remaining here, as settled, and must ask not to have this again mentioned.' To Derby at Downing Street a personal complaint is sent: 'Such precautions are taken here that the Queen will be little better than a State prisoner. She may consent to this for a short time, but she could not for long.' Grey's alarm was not unjustified, and the Queen knew that there was danger. In a quite remarkable manner she kept up on this occasion her superior dignity; no one could have been surprised if the woman who occupied so exposed a position had lost her nerve and had shown a quite natural fear. But Victoria ever knew how to communicate her assurance and her quiet courage to her *entourage*. The bearing of the Great Little Lady must inspire everyone with the deepest respect.

Grey's extraordinary gift for clearing up the most difficult situations by means of negotiations was to prove itself most useful towards the end of his career. For the seventh time the Queen was faced with a change of Government. Lord Derby had resigned on account of failing health, and the Tories remained at the helm. The choice lay between Derby's son, Lord Stanley, and Disraeli, who had now been the leader of his party for eighteen years. This time the Queen had no need for long hesitation, and Disraeli's great hour came to him at last at the age of sixty-four. The negotiations were conducted by Grey on behalf of the Queen, who remained in Osborne. It was easy to come to an accord with Disraeli – 'very cordial and most practical in all he said, going straight to the point' – and through General Grey he replied that 'he should place himself unreservedly at Your Majesty's disposal.' But Derby, whose power was still so great that his sanction was sought on various questions concerning the formation of the new Government, raised difficulties. Disraeli and Grey would therefore have liked Derby to remain in the Cabinet without portfolio, and Grey reported to the Queen, 'All

he would suggest, in Your Majesty's writing to Lord Derby, is that Your Majesty should express the opinion that the sooner the change was definitely settled, the better for the public service; and to urge Lord Derby to continue in the Government without office.' In accordance with this suggestion, Victoria wrote to Derby; referred to Wellington, who had also, after having been Leader of the Government, taken a seat in the Cabinet without office; and ended her letter by saying that Lord Derby's 'presence, whenever he felt equal to it, and his advice would be most valuable to his colleagues as well as to his Sovereign.' (It is a curious thing that Grey only learnt of the wording of this letter, sent on his advice to the outgoing Prime Minister, through Disraeli, the incoming Prime Minister. The chancery of the Private Secretary does not seem, during his absence, to have functioned very carefully. Grey, of course, when the Queen was away, sent to her copies of all outgoing letters.) Owing to Derby's indecision, the negotiations in London lasted longer than had originally been anticipated, and Grey 'hopes he has done as Your Majesty would wish in consenting to remain in London. But when Mr. Disraeli said "it was the greatest favour" he could do him, he felt Your Majesty would not wish him to refuse.' Quite assuredly Victoria thereupon excused Grey's longish absence. The last differences with Derby over, the peerages for his friends which he wanted carried through are settled, and Disraeli accepts - 'but he ventures to trust that, in the great affairs of State, Your Majesty will deign not to withhold from him the benefit of Your Majesty's guidance.' The mutual joy barely lasted ten months. At the elections under the new electoral Act the Tories met with a crushing defeat. On resigning, Disraeli wrote to Grey a kind of letter of thanks: 'I reciprocate all your feelings, and shall cherish your friendship, which I highly esteem. Your conduct to me, during my tenure of office, has been admirable, and in quitting my post, it is a consolation to me to know that Her

## BEHIND THE THRONE

Majesty has near her a gentleman in whose abilities, experience, judgment, honour, and devotion she may place implicit reliance.' Rather more than thirty-six years had elapsed since the election at High Wycombe.

Not too willingly did the Queen send for Gladstone. When the telegram from Windsor, announcing Grey's arrival, was received at Hawarden, a suggestive scene took place, which Evelyn Ashley describes as follows: 'I was standing by him [Gladstone] holding his coat on my arm while he in his shirt-sleeves was wielding an axe to cut down a tree. Up came a telegraph messenger. He took the telegram, opened it, and read it, then handed it to me, speaking only two words, "very significant," and at once resumed his work. The message merely stated that General Grey would arrive that evening from Windsor. This of course implied that a mandate was coming from the Queen charging Mr. Gladstone with the formation of his first Government.' When Grey arrived, he was met at the station by Mrs. Gladstone. It was with her that the first negotiations took place, the subject being where Grey would spend the night. His intention had been to take a room at a hotel in Chester, but Mrs. Gladstone insisted that he should be her guest at Hawarden. On the drive it appeared that other than merely domestic matters could be discussed with the lady. 'Mrs. G. knew everything that had passed. The Queen's objections, etc., etc.!!' On his arrival Grey was at once taken 'into an almost dark room – the only light being the fire and the two candles by which Mr. G. was working.' A peculiar *mise en scène*, which Grey has preserved for us in his memorandum. The discussions were begun by Gladstone in 'the most open, frank, and cordial manner,' and went off far more smoothly than the parties had expected and feared, leaving Grey with the immediate impression that Gladstone 'would make no objection to whatever the Queen might wish.' Clarendon's remaining on at the Foreign Office was the only point on which no agreement could be reached at

this initial stage. Victoria had, through Grey, raised objections to him, without, however, giving any sufficient reasons, so that the negotiating Private Secretary was not in a position seriously to contest the appointment. Gladstone supposed that Clarendon, 'a man of free and entertaining and almost jovial conversation in society,' had perhaps incurred the Queen's displeasure because 'some remark culled from the dinner-hour had been reported to the Queen with carelessness or malignity.' But Clarendon was among the few men with whom Gladstone had fully discussed a change of Government, and had expressed the wish 'to see him return to his old post.' Grey, however, had no authority to agree to Clarendon, and it was left that this point should be settled between the Queen and Gladstone personally, and as quickly as possible. Grey telegraphed from Hawarden to Windsor, asking the Queen to receive Gladstone. In anticipation of her consent the journey was begun at once, and in Chester the travellers found the Royal telegram agreeing to the visit. Gladstone 'soon after five had his audience of the Queen, leaving Windsor for London by the 6.15 train,' as Grey noted. Therefore forty-five minutes had sufficed to clear up all questions. As to Clarendon, the Queen withdrew her objections, and from the diary it appears that 'nothing could be more satisfactory than the whole interview'; on the following day a letter goes from Windsor to Gladstone in which it is stated that the Queen 'is too straightforward not to own to Mr. Gladstone that she regrets the unavoidable conclusion which his conversation with Lord Clarendon has led to; but we must hope that all will go smoothly.' This hope, however, proved deceptive; true, there were no differences with Clarendon, but there were with Gladstone himself, barely a month later, when the Premier brought in the Irish Church Bill. All the same, Gladstone's first Ministry lasted more than five years; when he had to tender his resignation, Grey had been dead four years. Three times more Gladstone stood

## BEHIND THE THRONE

at the head of the Government; when, twenty-five years after Grey's decease, he left Downing Street – this time for ever – he addressed a letter to General Ponsonby, Grey's successor: 'I have known and have liked and admired all the men who have served the Queen in your delicate and responsible office; and have liked more, probably because I knew him most, the last of them, that most true-hearted man, General Grey.'

At the age of sixty-five the General had in rapid succession several apoplectic strokes. Sir William Jenner at once reported the hopeless condition of the patient, and, deeply moved, Victoria had to recognise that 'again one of my most useful and devoted friends is likely to be taken from me.' For a few days the General lay unconscious in his apartments in St. James's Palace. When all was over, Ponsonby, whom Grey had recommended as his successor, 'when he talked of retiring,' accompanied the Queen to the house of mourning 'to see dear Mrs. Grey, whom I found so wonderfully resigned and patient in her grief. How I feel for her, having gone through the same terrible misfortune myself, and how truly and from my heart do I share her sorrow! After talking for a little while, she took me into the room where the dear General lay. . . . Poor dear General, I could not bear to think I should never look again on his face in this world! He was most truly devoted and faithful and had such a kind heart. His great worth, honesty, cleverness, charm of conversation, and his great experience, will ever remain engraven in our minds and hearts, and make us deeply lament his loss.'<sup>1</sup>

For thirty-three years Grey had been in the service of his Sovereign. Biddulph represented her at the funeral, and placed 'lilies of the valley, his favourite flower,' as the Queen's last greeting on his grave.

. . . . .  
<sup>1</sup> See Appendix.

## GENERAL GREY

Grey's fears of an attempt on the Queen's life by Fenian emissaries were premature, but not quite unjustified. Eight years after the General's warnings, Arthur O'Connor actually attacked the Queen, without, however, doing her any harm. The fright caused by this was great, and still greater was the confusion of the suite, every one of whom declared that he had arrested the criminal. O'Connor had pointed a pistol at the Queen which, however, 'had not been loaded, but it easily might have been'! During the inquiries it was discovered that the pistol 'not only was not loaded, but was incapable of being discharged, had it been loaded.' The Queen concludes these entries in her diary with a pious 'Thank God for His great mercy and for preserving me once again.' Victoria could not be induced to give up her accustomed drive on the following day; 'they cheered immensely as we drove out. I got up and stood in the carriage. . . . Immense enthusiasm. . . . Numerous ladies I knew, including . . . *poor Mrs. Grey and her daughters and little grandchildren, etc.*'

## CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE

LIEUTENANT-GENERAL HON. CHARLES GREY, 1804-1870

Son of the 2nd Earl Grey, Prime Minister, 1830-34, and  
of Elizabeth Ponsonby, d. of William, afterwards  
1st Lord Ponsonby.

- 1820 Entered Army.
- 1830-34 Private Secretary to his father.
- 1831 M.P. for High Wycombe.
- 1832 Opposed by Benjamin Disraeli.
- 1836 Married Caroline Elizabeth, d. of the late Sir Thomas Farquhar. (1870-1890, Extra Woman of the Bed-chamber.)
- 1837-67 Equerry to the Queen.
- 1840 In Gotha to invest Prince Albert with the Garter.
- 1849-61 Private Secretary to Prince Albert.
- 1851 Son, Albert, born (see Appendix).
- 1862 Acting Private Secretary to the Queen.
- 1863 Prussian-Danish war.
- 1864 April 1st, attacks on the Queen in *The Times*.  
April 6th, the Queen's reply in *The Times*.
- 1866 *The Early Years of the Prince Consort* published.
- 1867 Gazetted as Private Secretary to the Queen.  
Blowing up of Clerkenwell Prison by Fenian conspirators.
- 1868 February, Disraeli's first Ministry.  
December, Gladstone's first Ministry.
- 1872 O'Connor's attack on the Queen.

In the Court Circular of April 2nd, 1870, it is stated: 'Her Majesty, desirous of testifying her great regard for the lamented General, and regret for his loss, came to London . . . and paid a visit of condolence to the Hon. Mrs. Grey, at the St. James's Palace.'

## GENERAL GREY

### APPENDIX

On the occasion of this visit of condolence the Queen also pressed the hand of Grey's eldest son Albert, then aged nineteen. Albert succeeded to the Earldom of Grey in 1894, was for a time one of the directors of the British South Africa (Chartered) Company, and subsequently became Governor-General of Canada. He died in 1917.

Charles Grey had several children; one son, the first-born, died in infancy; of the daughters, Sybil married in 1867 the Duke of St. Albans; Victoria, in 1877, Lewis Payn Dawnay; Louisa Jane, 1875, the Earl of Antrim; and Mary Caroline, 1883, the Earl of Minto. Sybil died as early as 1871 and the Duke of St. Albans married as his second wife a daughter of Bernal Osborne.





## HENRY PONSONBY

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## HENRY PONSONBY

WHEN Ponsonby took over the post of Private Secretary, which only three years before, under Grey, had become officially recognised, Biddulph was the only one of the Old Guard still in office; Helps, the author, only now and then made an appearance in order to give information – all too rarely asked for – on some literary matter. The young Victoria had long ago become the experienced Queen; anyone who has for thirty years and more occupied a post, albeit a Royal one, begins in most people's opinion to appear old.

Up to now far too many heads had ruled and assisted in ruling. In effect, there were two who up to a few years ago had together occupied the Throne, and there were many more who from time to time collaborated behind the Throne. This multiplicity of the Albert-Coburg system was bound in time to leave traces which could not be of any possible assistance in promoting the monarchic (*monos* = sole; *arche* = rule) system of government. In spite of goodwill and endless diligence, a clear, single-minded line had up to now been missing; Coburgism had had in it something amateurish, and at the same time something tragic. Demands had been made from the Palace on Downing Street which could not possibly be fulfilled, and every request made by a Sovereign which cannot be fulfilled weakens that Sovereign's position. Whether this earlier partition of the Royal power and the many-headedness of the advisers were among the reasons why, in the first few years of the Queen's widowhood, her Ministers did not urge very strongly the collaboration of Albert Edward are points which can only be touched upon here; the responsible advisers had had

## BEHIND THE THRONE

unhappy experiences, a repetition of which they in no circumstances desired; they preferred to have to deal with one position, however difficult it may have proved and however difficult it may sometimes have been to approach, rather than with several.

They were men with great knowledge and good intellect who up to now had advised the Sovereign personally. But there was no really great man amongst them. They could correctly judge a given situation, but could not foresee one; theirs was not the gift to influence and to guide present events with a view to their future development. Ponsonby possessed this gift, this statesmanlike foresight. His predecessors had been men who had been prepared and educated for their office; they were good Private Secretaries but only Private Secretaries, and it is difficult to imagine them in any other great position; but Ponsonby might just as easily have occupied a seat on the other side of St. James's Park in Whitehall and have done great things. The necessary gifts for this he had – and also the traditions.

Like the Greys, the Ponsonbys were one of the great families of England. In a much too short family history John Ponsonby<sup>1</sup> tells us: 'The Ponsonby family, like many others, have served their King and Country with honour and distinction, and although nobody, so far, has risen to be Prime Minister, Archbishop of Canterbury, or Field Marshal, or can claim to have won the Derby or ridden the winner of the Grand National, yet we have supplied to the State many who have distinguished themselves as politicians, soldiers, sailors, and diplomatists.' And this list may be supplemented by a Lord Justice and a Lord Chancellor, by canons, bishops, and masters of fox-hounds. Ponsonby is the family name of the Earls of Bessborough, of the Lords de Mauley, and – more recently – of Lord Ponsonby of Shulbrede.<sup>2</sup> Their family relationships are so manifold and

<sup>1</sup> Major-General Sir John Ponsonby, K.C.B., Sir Henry's eldest son, born 1866.

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix 2.

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so numerous that they would require a study for themselves – and not one of the least interesting. A statement of the family relations of the ruling aristocracy is a part of English history; it enables the most remarkable and singular conclusions to be drawn. Caroline Ponsonby was married to Melbourne, who through this marriage became related to the great Whig families of the Spencers (Earls Spencer and Lords Althorp) and the Cavendishes (Dukes of Devonshire). Palmerston's wife was a sister of Melbourne. Gladstone, through his wife's mother, Lady Glynne of Hawarden, entered into the family of the Pitts and the Grenvilles. The Stanleys (Lord Derby) are related to the Cecils (Lord Salisbury); Arthur Balfour was a nephew of Lord Salisbury. Equally strong and interlaced were the connections of the great official families who occupied high positions partly in the Government, partly at the Court. General Bruce, the governor of the young Albert Edward, was a brother of Lady Augusta Stanley, the wife of the Dean of Westminster, and as Bedchamber Woman a kind of Lady Secretary to the Queen. Both were children of the diplomat the Earl of Elgin, of Elgin Marbles fame. The wife of General Grey, the Private Secretary, Caroline Farquhar, Woman of the Bedchamber, was a grand-daughter of Sir Walter, whose great-grandson, the subsequent Lord Farquhar, played under Edward VII a great part as the latter's official Master of the Household, and a still greater one as his unofficial adviser in financial matters. Lady Caroline Barrington, governess of the Royal children, was a sister of General Grey, her son Charles was Private Secretary to Lord Palmerston and Lord Russell, and her daughter Mary was married to Sir Algernon West, Private Secretary to Gladstone. (See 'The Private Secretaries' Pedigree.') General Grey's son Albert, subsequently Governor-General of Canada, was married to Alice Holford, whose brother George, of Dorchester House, belonged, as Equerry, to the *entourage* of Edward VII.

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Earl Grey, the Prime Minister, the father of the General, had, like Melbourne, married a Ponsonby – Mary Elizabeth; their granddaughter, Mary Bulteel,<sup>1</sup> at an early age in the service of the Court as Maid of Honour, married another Ponsonby – Henry, the Private Secretary. If, therefore, General Grey, when he spoke of retiring, suggested Henry Ponsonby as his successor, he was too conscious of his responsibility to do this only because the latter was a near relative. He recommended him because he knew Ponsonby's suitability and value; he did not go so far as on the ground of relationship not to recommend him.

Soon after Ponsonby had become Private Secretary, that office took on a different complexion, and before long assumed its own characteristic features. The new man's letters to the Sovereign also are, as regards style, tied to the existing conventional forms of etiquette; but for Ponsonby these limits formed no obstacle which prevented his submitting to the Queen decided views with tactful firmness. Up to now Victoria had never, when on the occasion of a change in the Government she, in spite of hints from the most varied quarters, again refused to come to London, been told by a Private Secretary: 'There was a disagreeable cry getting up that the delay was caused by the Queen being at Osborne.' Ponsonby not only advised the Sovereign, he tried to convince, to guide her, to lead the sometimes overflowing temperament into smoother waters. Perhaps Victoria had not quite the strong intellect of Elizabeth, but she had the same passionate love for her country, the same enthusiastic patriotism, and a far greater sense of justice. In the many years of her reign – three and thirty had passed when Ponsonby entered her service – she had learnt much, and had accumulated enormous experience; but against this stood the inclination to slide gradually into an entirely Conservative current. Democracy was a matter on which the Queen would not hear much; she knew very well 'that

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix 1.

## HENRY PONSONBY

Liberalism is not Socialism, and that progress does not mean Revolution,' but for everyday use she made the mistake of confounding democracy with republicanism. Ponsonby saw the chasm which was forming; not to let it grow – on the contrary, to bridge it – was one of his greatest tasks and achievements. As far back, indeed, as the days when Melbourne left her, Victoria had autocratic views which grew with the years and had the effect that her intercourse with her Ministers, especially with those against whom from the start she felt antipathy, became more and more difficult. Gladstone himself on one occasion had called this 'attitude towards a Liberal Minister' an 'armed neutrality'; on another he had to feel that 'as to confidence, she holds me . . . at arm's length.' Queen Victoria was a kind woman, but a strict taskmistress. Not Gladstone alone used to groan under the difficulties which official intercourse with Victoria entailed, and was of the opinion that 'the Queen alone was enough to kill any man.' Even Peel, who assuredly maintained the best relations with the Palace, had complained much about the heavy burden he was expected to bear: 'I defy the Minister of this country to perform properly the duties of his office . . . to keep up the constant communication with the Queen . . . and also sit in the House of Commons eight hours a day for 118 days.'

Here also, however difficult it may have been, Ponsonby had, behind the Throne, to compromise and make concessions without allowing his august mistress to know that her commands were softened, that any hardness was rounded off; she had to be convinced that Ponsonby's version contained her own words. Every Private Secretary must carry out the instructions given him, especially when it is a Sovereign who gives them. But it requires a great amount of tact and ingenuity to render the sense of a command the wording of which was: ' . . . Lord Salisbury should also try and meet the Government.'<sup>1</sup> But the very unconciliatory

<sup>1</sup> This relates to the Irish Land Bill.



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way in which Mr. G. met the Lords' amendments was unwise and sure to cause *what* has now occurred. For the sake of the country and the Sovereign this should be got over. Say so in my name. I hold both responsible. If Mr. G. won't submit, why does he not retire and let one of his colleagues do so? *The country* is to be considered, and not men.' It was much more easy to send emotional telegrams from the seclusion of Osborne than to carry out such instructions in London, in the midst of the bustle of Parliamentary business and face to face. But Ponsonby had, happily for the Queen, the strong judgment and sense of duty to carry out his task in the manner which the situation and consideration for men required. In less serious cases also, Ponsonby had the not always easy task 'to translate her sometimes petulant expressions of opinion, adorned by an excessive amount of superlatives, into language which would convey her view accurately but less baldly without giving offence.' He himself had a particularly good style, and was a frequent contributor to *Notes and Queries* over the signature 'Sebastian.'

To such an extent did Ponsonby take part, both by advising and by carrying out, in all matters with which the Queen had to deal, that to write his life and his activities would almost amount to writing the history of the late Victorian age. His twenty-five years of service as the Queen's first personal adviser comprise, as regards home politics, the most violent fights over Home Rule and other great Irish questions, over Army Reform and the office of Commander-in-Chief, over the dissensions between Lords and Commons, over the Franchise Bill – in addition to which there were seven changes of Government.

It may easily be imagined that, perhaps under another Sovereign, this alternation between only two parties could have taken place more smoothly, with less friction, especially as, considering the only possibilities, there was not overmuch room for variation. It must have in time become clear to the Queen that, so long as his powers lasted, and even beyond

that, Gladstone was the only Liberal possibility, and it was just as sure that, after the death of Beaconsfield, the Tories would put forward Salisbury. In the course of the many years, it might further be imagined, this procedure of an almost automatic change of Prime Ministers might have been accepted by the Queen with more composure – as a matter of routine. But routine was a matter with which Victoria refused to have anything to do, except when it was concerned with her changes of residence, which by now had also become quite regular; it was different when an opportunity was offered to assert her sovereign influence. The current activities of the Government did not often afford this opportunity, mostly only if things went wrong. Victoria was not satisfied with reigning; she also wanted to govern. In spite of the many complaints and assurances of her unhappy position, the old Queen loved her profession just as much as young Victoria had loved it. The exercise of it was possible, to a Sovereign so strongly tied by the Constitution, only when the Government was weak or, at a time of change, practically non-existent. Those were Victoria's 'great times' which she probably did not find quite so trying as might be assumed from her complaints. Otherwise the Queen herself would in all likelihood have seen to it that the whole procedure should pass off more simply, without such a tax on nerves, work, and time for all concerned. For was it really a State necessity that the whole business should every time be so complicated? The result achieved was so trifling in comparison with the labour involved, so far as it was not already obvious from the very start. Ponsonby, whose responsibilities during the times of a change of Government were greater than those of his predecessors, because in time his discretionary powers had become greater, always tried, in spite of all obstacles, to limit these difficulties to an absolute minimum. And all through he had in view the strengthening of the Royal authority, but never gave an opportune counsel against his conviction.

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Ponsonby's own political views were, like Grey's, Liberal, and perhaps even more pronouncedly so, so that the Queen was sometimes somewhat alarmed when they became rather too obvious. And yet she was quite willing to make use of them if the situation seemed to require it, and the Queen then thought that Ponsonby 'has so many Whig friends that he might easily arrange' this or that matter. He was an extraordinarily great worker, without consideration for himself and without any pretensions; on the door of his study was a notice, 'Don't knock; come in.' He never made a speech and 'never associated his name with any movement or with any act of administration.' The same man who stopped in the middle in his work to listen patiently and attentively to a question as to 'whether the Crown Equerry or the Equerry in Waiting should ride on the right of the Queen' had, where he himself was concerned, a disregard of all conventions, and was actually careless about dress; he put on what happened to be there and was comfortable. His sense of humour helped him over many obstacles and unpleasantnesses. The Queen assented to a certain proposal after long hesitation; Colonel Stanley (afterwards Lord Derby), Secretary for War, had to convey to the Cabinet Her Majesty's approval, but the official letter had not reached him, and all he had was a private letter from his old friend Ponsonby, which ran 'The Queen says "D—mn" but gives in.' That of course he was not able to show to members of the Cabinet. On one occasion it was suggested that some of the Yeomen of the Guard should be sent to Cowes to grace the reception of William II. Plainly and without any ambiguity Henry Ponsonby replied, 'The Queen says she is damned if the Beefeaters shall leave London.' His subsequent assistant and successor in office, Bigge (Lord Stamfordham), gave after many years this description of his former chief: 'The longer I live and the more I look back, the more remarkable man he seems to me. One of, if not the, greatest gentlemen I have known:

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the entire effacement of self: the absolute non-existence of conceit or pose: the charming courtesy to strangers old, young, high, low, rich, poor. His extraordinary wit and sense of the ridiculous, his enormous powers of work – too much – it killed him, but I never heard him say he was hard-worked or “had too much to do,” nor did I ever hear him say, “Oh, don’t bother! Come back in five minutes; I am writing an important letter to the Queen, or Prime Minister, or Archbishop of Canterbury, Cardinal Manning, Mrs. Langtry, etc.”’ And what remarkable tasks this much-occupied man had sometimes to carry out. On one occasion he had to write to Stanley, Dean of Westminster, to ask his opinion about a certain passage in the Bible. The fact was that according to the Revised Version, which gave a new translation of the Old and New Testaments, it did not appear quite so clear as the Queen would have wished that Solomon was not an illegitimate, but a most legitimate, son of David. Somewhat apologetically, Ponsonby writes that the Queen ‘urged me to ask your opinion,’ and that she ‘is rather scandalised by the proposed alteration.’ With the groan, ‘This I believe is nearly the only subject we have had much discourse on for the last three weeks, except the war,<sup>1</sup> which entirely absorbs our entire faculties,’ closes this letter of a much-tried man !

In addition to his current work as Secretary, combined with the activities of a negotiator between Sovereign and Government, Ponsonby had to attend to the responsible duties of the Privy Purse, which alone took up several hours of his time every day. He introduced new ideas into the old routine, and started a sort of gazette, composed of Press cuttings which it was essential the Queen should see; this Court journal he edited himself. Lawson, the later 1st Lord Burnham, of the *Daily Telegraph*, suggested to Ponsonby that he might allow his paper to reproduce that part of this circular which dealt with the Queen personally and her

<sup>1</sup> This was the Franco-German War.

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travelling arrangements, so that the public might be authentically informed and false reports as to this might cease; but the Queen thought that she ought to refuse her consent to this. Just as Grey at one time had to deny newspaper reports that the Prince of Wales had most enormous debts, so Ponsonby had now to deny that the Queen was most enormously wealthy, and must even see to it that all letters to the Queen are not scrawled but are written in good clear writing; she remembers that Palmerston had 'many, many years ago' – about forty have elapsed since then – issued an order that all documents 'are to be written in a good round distinct hand.' Let Ponsonby now attend to it that this order is carried out! 'Unfortunately,' Victoria adds in her letter to Sir Henry, 'Lord Rosebery himself is the very worst offender.'<sup>1</sup> Ponsonby's tact and ingenuity probably were equal to the task of gently drawing the Prime Minister's attention to the necessity of writing a better fist for the future.'<sup>2</sup>

None of the former Private Secretaries had to the same extent been called upon to help in the carrying out of the personal wishes and affairs of the Royal Family; this took up much time, for 'all the members of the Royal Family were accustomed to refer to him small but perplexing problems.' But this was not eventually limited to 'small matters.' When the Duke of Connaught was to take over an important command abroad, when Albert Edward wished to see his son George – His present Majesty – in the House of Lords, always it was Ponsonby who was called in and questioned. He developed into a kind of standing committee between the extensive family and the almost unapproachable head. The habit not to apply to the Queen direct, but to lay all wishes before Ponsonby, increased the more as in time all found that everything was for the best in his hands, and that he

<sup>1</sup> See p 236.

<sup>2</sup> It may be interesting in this connection to mention that shortly after the introduction of the typewriter into this country (1890), Queen Victoria bought one for use at Windsor.

would find the right moment for going to the Queen in the interest of the petitioners.

One of the most serious discussions in the Royal Family, however, was on a question which could not remain a pure family matter, but, on the contrary, became a serious problem with which the Government, irrespective of party as well as the Queen's personal advisers – Ponsonby among the first – had to deal, and which yet remained unsolved: the relations between the occupant of the Throne and the heir to the Throne. Historical biography in our day is inclined not to see a hero in the personality to be depicted, as was the case with the Old School; the character is now stripped of heroic qualities – is made human, for everyday use. In connection with no great historic figure of the last century has this tendency been more strongly shown than in connection with Queen Victoria. No longer does she sit on her Throne far away from men, surrounded by mists of admiring praise, but her enormous achievements and her peculiar deficiencies are measured by a purely human scale. But from whichever point of view the commanding personality of the Great Queen is considered, her relation to her eldest son will remain obscure. The picture not only of the Queen, but also of the mother, begins to grow dim when we try to find motives for the fact that Albert Edward the child was submitted to so unhappy an education, and to ask why the riper, even older man, who longed for an activity to which he was entitled, was denied it. From the very first moment of his accession to the Throne, Edward VII gave abundant proof that he possessed not only the great abilities, but also the personality, which enabled him to stand in the foremost rank of English Kings. For decades these gifts had been wasted.

Victoria, who, if she did not belong to the greatest, certainly was one of the strongest personalities of the nineteenth century, and undoubtedly is the most individual figure of that epoch – not only because she was a reigning

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woman – had her human weaknesses, and made mistakes which may be in some way explained, for which some motive or other may be found; but this is not so in her treatment of the Prince of Wales. No one could move her in this matter, not even the faithful and trusted Ponsonby, although from his relations to the Prince we must conclude that in this controversy he stood on the side of the son. When, after Arabi Pasha's revolt, the Household Cavalry and a Brigade of Guards were ordered to the front, the then forty-one-years-old Albert Edward reported himself 'to be of use in a national emergency' and for active service at the front. True it is, the Queen highly appreciated the feeling and the desire expressed in the offer, but Ponsonby had to write to the Prince that 'the imperative demands of public duty compelled H.M. to point out the grave difficulties and inconveniences of such a proceeding,' and that therefore the Queen 'finally and conclusively' had decided 'that it was necessary to ask Your R.H. to abandon the idea.' It would be explicable and easily understood that the ageing Queen was moved by the consideration that she did not like to part for so long with a young collaborator, who was to ascend the Throne after her, whose advice she was not able to dispense with. But no such consideration could have been, or was in fact, present. Only in a purely representative capacity was the Prince allowed any field of activity – and it was in just this capacity that people wanted to see the bearer of the Crown in person. Invisible and alone, sharing her power with no one, the Queen remained the head of the State; Albert Edward, often visible, was the head of Society. This attitude appears again in her refusal of the 'Cabinet key.' That key, which her Consort had unhesitatingly used with much less Constitutional justification, had been handed to Albert Edward by Rosebery when the latter was Foreign Secretary. When the Queen heard this, she expressed her strongest displeasure, and even protested formally against the Foreign Secretary's concession. But – in all

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probability restrained by Ponsonby – she did not pursue the matter further, and access to the foreign despatches was not withdrawn from the Prince. Somewhat later, exactly on the day when the heir to the Throne attained the age of fifty-one, the Queen had learnt from Gladstone, who was always inclined to talk and write too much, that ‘for several years past’ it had been the practice to inform the Prince of Wales of the decisions of the Cabinet, and that now – his last period of office had just begun – he will, through his Private Secretary, Sir Algernon West, ‘make arrangements accordingly.’ By return, a written inquiry was addressed by Victoria to Ponsonby ‘whether this principle was ever adopted by Lord Salisbury. Would Sir Henry ask Lord Salisbury and ask Mr. Gladstone to pause before pursuing this course regularly? She thinks it can only have been on very particular occasions. And Sir A. West is not a person to be made the spokesman of the Government, himself not in the Government.’ On the same day on which the Queen sent to Ponsonby this request, to be dealt with by him in the ordinary course of his departmental work, the mother enters in her diary: ‘Dear Bertie’s birthday. May God bless and preserve him.’ In the Prince Consort’s times the young Prince received memoranda as birthday gifts. Now, to celebrate the day, his slender insight into affairs is to be curtailed. The inquiry having been addressed to Ponsonby, the ball was set rolling. The first to report to Ponsonby was Sir Francis Knollys, Albert Edward’s Private Secretary: ‘I am sorry that such reflections have been thrown on Private Secretaries!’ and after this sigh of relief he adds, ‘Monty Corry in Lord Beaconsfield’s time, and McDonnell under Lord Salisbury, were always employed to forward the Cabinet decisions to the Prince of Wales.’ Very adroitly and cleverly he skirts the question, and expresses the opinion that it would be ‘hardly fair on Mr. Gladstone to ask him to undertake this duty.’ Sir Algernon West, who was, of course, not concerned, the sole point at issue being



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the fact that Albert Edward was informed, wrote to Ponsonby: 'In answer to your whisper, I had better say that I hope you will trust to my discretion in what I say to the Prince of Wales. My idea was to let him know generally what was going on rather than anything else. If there were anything personal to H.M., or unhappily any difference of opinion in the Cabinet, I should not mention it. I certainly do not mean to send him a copy of Mr. Gladstone's letter to H.M. There will be some Cabinet shortly, and I will send you a specimen of what I say, and you can compare it with what Mr. Gladstone says to the Queen and tell me if you approve.' Now it is Salisbury's turn, who, of all those to whom the sorely tried Ponsonby had to apply, gives the cleverest answer; during the three months since he left Downing Street he has forgotten everything relating to this matter, and 'cannot remember a single instance' of having sent a report to the Prince. Ponsonby's letter had even 'caused him great perplexity.' He has not the slightest doubt that 'the Prince of Wales's memory is better than mine' – the latter having 'admitted,' through Knollys, that he had received the reports – 'and that his statement refers to some incident that I have forgotten.' This version is the most convenient one for the Queen, and as the result she is 'quite sure what Lord Salisbury says is the fact, for she is certain nothing of the kind was ever done, or ought to be done. Will Sir Henry explain this to Sir F. Knollys and Mr. Gladstone? Any very important decision might be communicated.' Thus this storm, like so many others, also ended peacefully. It had raged for exactly sixteen days, and its waves, which started from the Royal discontent at Balmoral, beat against Downing Street, Sandringham, and Hatfield; it had caused much work, given many headaches, and – things remained exactly as they were! From the Throne the Sovereign had issued a prohibition to send to the Prince of Wales regular reports. Behind the Throne, however, the efficient Private Secretaries, on whom,

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quite unnecessarily, 'such reflections have been thrown,' all the same found a compromise; once more Sir Algernon approaches Ponsonby, and, in a still softer whisper than the previous one, confides to him, 'I will be as discreet as possible in a condition of things not altogether easy. I always mark my memorandum "secret."' Was this perhaps not confidential information at all, but rather an agreement with a suggestion of Ponsonby? . . .

The discussions as to the Irish University Bill produced in public opinion and in the Press such a unanimity of views as Gladstone, when he brought in the motion, had hardly anticipated: Protestants and Roman Catholics on this occasion were absolutely united – in their dissent; in the House of Commons the Bill was thrown out and the Government defeated. The Prime Minister decided to resign at once, and by return, on the very same evening, Ponsonby was sent by the Queen to Parliament, which was still sitting, so as to be able to negotiate with the Leader of the Opposition. But Disraeli was not present, and, curiously enough, was not even in the House when the Government was defeated. After Ponsonby had been waiting for some time, Disraeli arrived, having been caught by 'pickets' who had been placed at the two entrance-doors. His first words, on greeting Ponsonby in one of the waiting-rooms, were, 'I am sorry it has come to this. I did not expect it.' For a whole week Ponsonby went backwards and forwards, but Disraeli remained firm to his first well-considered decision – he refused now to take office. At Gladstone's request Disraeli was asked 'to put his reply into writing'; as to his explanations, however, 'Mr. Gladstone did not find himself able to gather their precise effect,' which may be taken to mean that he did not intend to understand them. Once again, and on several more occasions, Ponsonby visited Disraeli, who at the time was very unhappy, at Edward's Hotel, near Hanover Square. Apart from the official report as to the conversation, certified by Disraeli to be correct,

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Ponsonby drew up a more intimate report, the latter part of which gives an uncommonly vivid picture of these curious 'negotiations in time of crisis': 'During the first part of the interview Disraeli sat at a table, and, as he spoke with eagerness, there was something in his over-civil expression about "the Queen" or "my dear Colonel," which made me think he was playing with me, and I felt once or twice a difficulty in not laughing, but when he developed the reasons of his policy he rose and stood much more upright than I have ever seen him, spoke in a most frank and straightforward manner, and with a sharpness and decision which was different from his early words. Yet, probably he had measured the length of my foot and had been more sincere and honest in his message to the Queen than when he made me believe in his frank exposition of policy. He was far easier to speak to than Gladstone, who forces you into his groove, while Disraeli apparently follows yours and is genial, almost too genial, in his sentiment.' For a week, what Morley considered 'a match between two unsurpassed masters of political sword-play' went on. With all respect for such an authority, to-day, sixty years later, and at a certain distance, one is inclined to look upon this particular crisis as somewhat comic; but it is certain that there was some confusion in the negotiations, and the final result was that—everything remained as before. Once more Gladstone waited upon the Queen, 'not for any distinct object, but partly to fill the blank before the public. H.M. was in perfect humour. She will use the whole or part of my long letter by sending it to Disraeli. She seemed quite to understand our point of view, and told me plainly what shows that the artful man *did* say, if it came back to him again at this juncture, he would not be bound by his present refusal. I said, "But, Ma'am, that is not before me." "But he told me," she said.' Gladstone and his unchanged Cabinet resumed office. Ponsonby, however, had been able for the first time to prove his mettle as the representative of the



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Sovereign in a critical situation, and had received his baptism of fire in the bombardment of memoranda. And, quite within the tradition of knighthood, Ponsonby with a knightly gesture leaves his lady for whom he had fought, no matter on what field, the honour of victory: 'In humbly congratulating Your Majesty upon the termination of the crisis, begs leave most respectfully to thank Your Majesty for the clear and unmistakable directions Your Majesty has throughout given to him, which has made his duty of conveying Your Majesty's commands an easy one. . . .' Victoria, likewise in the style of a great lady in whose colours a tournament has been fought, hands the knight the palm of victory: 'It is for the Queen much more to thank Colonel Ponsonby for the great help he afforded her, and for the great judgment, tact, and zeal he showed during these trying days. . . .'

During the negotiations which led to a compromise in the severe struggle between Lords and Commons, Ponsonby 'was indefatigable and infinitely ingenious in inventing devices of possible compromise,' not only between the two Parliamentary Houses, but also between the Lords and the Ministers. His object in this was to secure the passing of franchise, and also 'to secure the creation of new electoral areas before the extended franchise should become operative.' A compromise was effected; the Upper House accepted the Franchise Bill, and at the same time the Redistribution of Seats Bill, for which the Lords had traded their consent, passed through both Houses. Thus once more a struggle within the borders of the Constitution was happily avoided.

Foreign politics Victoria considered, in the true Albert-Stockmar tradition, as a special preserve of the Sovereign, which in reality ought not at all to be subject to Parliamentary control. Acting on this trend of thought, she had not, until now, consulted in all foreign matters any advisers apart from the officially responsible Minister, whom she could not in fact ignore. Only in Ponsonby's time did the Queen

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depart from this system; in matters of foreign politics also Ponsonby is not, like his predecessors, merely the executive organ, but he is called in as adviser also. Right in his first years of office, shortly after the Franco-German War, confidential soundings begin as to whether closer relations between England and France might not be possible. The French Ambassador at the Court of St. James's was at the time the Comte de Jarnac, who, as long as thirty years previously, in the days of Louis-Philippe, had invented the phrase *entente cordiale* and had already negotiated with Aberdeen about Anglo-French relations. Ponsonby did not think much of close relations with France. 'Germany, Austria, and even Russia,' he wrote to Lord Derby, 'are far more useful, natural, and good allies for England; but we should always try to be on good and friendly terms with France. The Duke of Wellington used to say, when the great intimacy in the time of King Louis-Philippe existed, "Plenty of friendship, but no love," and this is quite true. . . .' Roughly forty years later, matters developed in another direction, but much in these words of Ponsonby remains true to-day. One of his last statements on a great question of foreign politics relates to conditions in the Transvaal. Very clearly he draws the Queen's attention to the differences between the newly immigrated population, who 'complain that they are not given votes,' and the Government, 'which is in the hands of uneducated Boers.' Thus he sees, four years before it actually broke out, not only the coming of the great Boer War, but he also recognises the reasons which must inevitably lead to it. Between these two statements, the first and last within a period of twenty-five years, decisions of the greatest import were taken; into all these matters Ponsonby delved in order to be able to report on them to the Queen and to advise her: repeated danger of war, the ever-recurring Afghan question, and then Egypt and the Sudan, with the tragic death of Gordon.

In the early eighties the development of Egypt and the

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correlated question of sovereignty over the Sudan began to enter the foreground of political events. There were times when, as woman and human being, Victoria felt more unhappy than she did at this period, but none when her sufferings as Queen were greater. Incessantly Ponsonby is called upon by the Sovereign to advise, to initiate, to negotiate. Indefatigably he was active in all directions; with Gladstone, Hartington, and all those who were connected with this unfortunate development and its tragic conclusion, he stood in constant touch, in uninterrupted correspondence. In the *Letters* we meet Ponsonby's name on every page. His situation at this time must have been an especially painful one; as soldier he naturally shared the standpoint of the Queen, of which, however, the Government had not one vestige; but the old Whig was bound to find it difficult to pass on to the revered Liberal leader the sharp views which the Queen handed him as a basis for his personal negotiations. In addition to all the heavy work, it was his task to turn the Queen's letters, which almost bordered on despair, into business-like communications.

When the crushing news arrived of the fall of Khartoum, from which the death of Gordon might be taken as certain, the Queen decided upon an exceptional measure: she sent to Gladstone, Hartington, and Granville in a telegram *en clair* her acute displeasure as to the policy pursued. The Queen's reproof was as follows: ' . . . all this might have been prevented and many precious lives saved by earlier action. . . . ' The Ministry felt this open communication as a public censure, and was correspondingly deeply hurt. A bitter complaint from Edward Hamilton, Gladstone's Private Secretary, was received by Ponsonby, who unreservedly takes his Queen's part: ' . . . the Queen really feels so much for the honour of her great Empire that she with difficulty abstained from writing more strongly than she did.' She did not at all approve of Ponsonby's further statement to Hamilton that with the unciphered telegram the Queen had



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not intended any censure of her Ministers; she looks upon this as a retreat, and Ponsonby, between two fires, has to try to convince the Queen that it was far from his intention 'to calm Mr. Gladstone's feelings.' But he must point out that Gladstone had already 'sent to inquire if the message had been made known by the telegraph clerks to others,' and that he was considering whether he could remain in office if publicly condemned by the Queen. This, he says, had been the reason for his lines to Hamilton, in order by this means to 'reduce the question to one of minor detail.' But this time Gladstone was irreconcilable; not even Ponsonby's statement, which went much further than the Queen had really wished, sufficed to pacify him. Through Hamilton he causes Ponsonby to be informed that he considered it 'disrespectful on his part to enlarge upon the subject at this moment,' but, by the closing remark that 'he must consider that Her Majesty is the best judge of what to say and how to say it,' he again expressly saddles the Queen with full responsibility for the telegram. How deeply the Queen felt Gordon's death appears from the sensational letter which she addressed to the General's sister; she 'keenly felt the stain left upon England' by Gordon's 'cruel but heroic fate.' When the Cabinet still could not decide upon 'a firm course' in the future steps to be taken in Egypt, a pathetic request is sent to Ponsonby 'to prepare a letter for me for Mr. Gladstone. . . . It is this hopeless way of going on which would make me hail a change of Government. Otherwise, if they will but be firm, honest, and not so miserably undecided and non-supporting or believing those they employ - I don't care if they remain in. But I have no confidence left, and lose all heart, all hope! Why cling to office when they are so discredited at home and abroad? It is so humiliating and dreadful for me.' We must show the deepest respect to so human an expression of despair. Ponsonby had the difficult task of constructing from this letter a communication to the Prime Minister in office into which not a single sentence is

conveyed *verbatim*, but which yet gives expression to the fact that the Queen 'cannot conceal her dismay' that the Cabinet has not yet come to a decision, and concludes: 'The Queen laments this want of decision and firmness in the Government, which gives her the greatest anxiety for the future.'

The incoherent Egyptian policy and its disastrous consequences had endangered Gladstone's Cabinet; on a vote on the Budget it found itself in a minority, and Gladstone at once resigned. The Queen requested Salisbury, the successor in the leadership of the Conservative Party, to form a Ministry. (Thus, after seventeen years of alternation between a Gladstone Ministry and a Disraeli Ministry, the first fresh face since Derby appeared at the head of the Government.) The Whigs still, at least nominally, had a majority in the House, and it would have pleased Salisbury if Gladstone had attached stipulations to his occupying the post of leader of the Opposition. A very complicated situation had arisen, in which questions of principle and Constitution had to be discussed. The Queen's presence in London had on all sides been urgently asked and requested, but she remained in Balmoral. There she is 'dreadfully tired of this long business' – for the protraction of which her absence is to a large extent responsible – and Ponsonby has to do the lion's share of the work in London. Matters are made somewhat easier for him by the fact that Bigge, the Assistant Private Secretary, has meanwhile become familiar with his work and can assist his chief in Balmoral. Ponsonby is on his feet from early morn till dewy eve, runs from one consultation to the other, and has visited Gladstone no less than six times in one day. On the occasion of this change in the Ministry his activities found official appreciation from a party which had the ear of the whole country: in the House of Lords, Granville reported what had happened on the change of Government, and expressly mentioned Ponsonby, 'whose activity, judgment, and tact in the difficult task he had to discharge is generally recognised.'

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Once more Ponsonby took part in a change of Prime Ministers without a change of Government being involved, namely when Gladstone was relieved by Rosebery. The Queen had intentionally omitted to ask for Constitutional advice, and had simply requested Rosebery – thus ignoring Harcourt – to accept office. As Harcourt also was waiting in the antechamber, this led to a serio-comic incident, owing to the defective hearing of Lord Acton, the Lord in Waiting in attendance.<sup>1</sup> If Gladstone had been asked, he would have suggested neither Rosebery nor Harcourt, neither Morley nor Asquith ('still too young'), but Lord Spencer. 'In all these different negotiations Ponsonby had not only to advise the Queen, but also to defend her when Cabinet Ministers thought she was not acting constitutionally.'

In spite of the many and occasionally also complicated changes of Government, Ponsonby's greatest achievement was his piloting his Sovereign's ship safely through the rocks and dangers of Cardwell's Army Reform. All were opposed to the innovations, which eventually brought with them the abolition of advancement by purchase: the Queen, the Duke of Cambridge as Commander-in-Chief, supported by a large majority of officers. It was a case of the old antagonism between the Horse Guards and the War Office. Ponsonby, with his strong inclination towards the military side, is the energetic, but at the same time only negotiating, exponent; he 'is convinced that it is Mr. Cardwell's earnest desire to raise the efficiency of Your Majesty's Army to the highest pitch and to increase the power of Your Majesty over the Army to the fullest extent. He holds that Your Majesty is the sole and entire head of the Army, and that he is Your Majesty's responsible adviser for all things military.' Even the abolition of purchase, to which she was particularly opposed, he managed to make palatable to the Queen; it will 'soon produce beneficial effects, and will be regarded as one of the grandest military reforms which have adorned

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix 3.

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Your Majesty's reign' – a line of thought and a method of expression which might just as well have come from Disraeli. Many years later the Hartington Commission, proposing the creation of a Naval and Military Council of Defence, intended again to effect a far-reaching change which would have affected the Queen most deeply. To Ponsonby's report, 'He is alarmed by Lord Hartington's Committee's report, which proposes to abolish the office of Commander-in-Chief,' Victoria makes the somewhat autocratic-sounding marginal note: 'This cannot be allowed for one moment, and Sir Henry should take steps to prevent this being even discussed. V.R.I.,' although it does not appear clear from such marginal note how it would have been possible for Ponsonby to prevent a discussion. Victoria, however, was lucky, for the Cabinet had already decided against the recommendation – at any rate for the present. But, all the same, a Military Council was created, only with the Commander-in-Chief as the first military member of it. And, somewhat later, the 'cherished fiction' that the Commander-in-Chief was the permanent personal deputy of the Sovereign also came to an end.

Meanwhile serious family cares had again come into the foreground of interest – the Queen's worries about her daughter. In order to be able to report about every phase Ponsonby carried on an extensive correspondence with Colonel Leopold Swaine, the British Military Attaché in Berlin, who, in addition to the official reports, sent accounts of the Crown Prince Frederick's illness, the dark intrigues at Court, and the tragic situation of the Crown Princess. From yet another side reliable accounts came to England, for Lady Ponsonby,<sup>1</sup> a childhood friend of the young Victoria, had visited the Crown Prince and Crown Princess at the Villa Zirio at San Remo, and subsequently was present in the sick-room in Berlin. In letters addressed partly direct to the Queen, partly to her husband, she gives

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix 1. '

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an affecting picture of the almost incredible conditions at Court. On the death of the old Emperor William the daughter had after all become Empress – for ninety-nine days only – and the Queen, putting all political considerations on one side, resolved to go to Berlin, to help her daughter by her personal presence.<sup>1</sup> Nor did the Queen's worries end with the death of her son-in-law; the correspondence with William, the grandson, now Emperor, becomes more and more painful. When the Emperor Frederick died, the Queen remarked, 'None of my own sons could be a greater loss.'

It is symptomatic of the degree of distrust which even then existed between such near relatives that as early as two days after the death of the Emperor Frederick, Colonel Swaine arrived in Balmoral and brought papers 'which Fritz had desired should be placed in my care.'<sup>2</sup> Is it surprising that the Court of St. James's did not look with too much favour upon anything coming from Berlin? General Winterfeldt, who came officially to Windsor to announce the death of the Emperor Frederick and the accession of William, had to put up with a very cool reception, and the Queen wrote to Ponsonby that she was 'extremely glad to hear that General Winterfeldt says he was received coldly, though civilly; for such was her intention.' When subsequently a complaint was submitted, through Ponsonby, from Berlin, that the Emperor was much hurt at the bad reception of his Envoy, the Queen merely made the laconic comment, 'The Queen intended it should be cool. She last saw him [Winterfeldt] as her son-in-law's A.D.C. He came to her and never uttered one word of sorrow for his death, and rejoiced in the accession of his new master.' A dismal chapter which, however, never closes; the family discussions acquire more and more political import. On several more occasions Ponsonby had to interfere: there was the

<sup>1</sup> See pp. 199–203.

<sup>2</sup> This was not the correspondence between mother and daughter which Frederick Ponsonby (*Letters of the Empress Frederick*) published in 1929.

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unpleasant incident between Albert Edward and the Emperor at the Court of Vienna, and other discussions, which finally led to Ponsonby writing to Sir Edward Malet, the English Ambassador in Berlin, 'to hint' that the annual visits of William to Cowes 'are not quite desirable.' It was a misfortune for Europe and the whole world that these ever-increasing antagonisms led to a tragic result. . . .

After this dismal glimpse into the 'future' which for the present generation has long since become terrible past, the ever-running clock of history must once more be put back. . . .

When the Ministry of Disraeli, now Earl of Beaconsfield, was approaching its end, the Queen again thought of days long past, and reminded Ponsonby how Stockmar and Anson mastered the difficulties when Peel came into office, some time before the Government of Melbourne resigned. At that time, Ponsonby pointed out in his reply, circumstances were different; 'Baron Stockmar and Mr. Anson were daily meeting persons of both parties. If Sir Henry Ponsonby were to enter into communication with any of the Opposition Leaders at this moment, it might be looked upon as a direct message from the Queen, and might lead to complications.' Once more the Queen tried to escape a Gladstone Ministry; but Ponsonby foresees correctly that it is unavoidable, since 'every day the cry becomes stronger for Mr. Gladstone.' But, above all, Ponsonby advises the Queen not to be hasty in anything 'till Your Majesty has seen Lord Beaconsfield, and has learnt from him whom he would advise Your Majesty to summon.' - Before Beaconsfield resigned office, one of the last proposals which he submitted to the Sovereign was to appoint Ponsonby a Privy Councillor. In words full of feeling, Sir Henry expressed to the retiring Minister his thanks for the honour and 'the very kind manner in which you have always treated me.' In the concluding paragraph of this letter Ponsonby almost grows beyond his own stature, and finds words of cordiality

and legitimate dignity which call for unqualified admiration, for it is an old Whig who addresses them to the most Tory of statesmen; a more complete absence of political bias can hardly be imagined. It is as follows: 'But, however grateful I am for your kindness to me, may I be allowed to add my deep sense of the service of friendship you have rendered to the Queen personally, which has undoubtedly softened the difficulties and alleviated her troubles? Your retirement from office, therefore, is not only the resignation of a Minister, but the loss to the Queen of a true and faithful friend, and my position here allows me, I hope, to share the Queen's real regret at such a separation.' In the meantime, however, Beaconsfield had also taken farewell from Ponsonby in writing: 'I thought perhaps you would have made a little call on me yesterday to condole with my fallen fortunes. . . .' Fallen fortunes they were indeed; he never again returned to power, and a year to the day after Ponsonby's words he was dead.

Fourteen years later the time had come for Gladstone also to take leave of Downing Street and of power. 'His last act in relation to this closing scene of the great official drama' was a letter to General Ponsonby: 'The first entrance of a man to Windsor Castle in a responsible character is a great event in his life; and his last departure from it is not less moving. . . . However, it is not even now so hard, but that I can feel what you have most kindly written; nor do I fail to observe with pleasure that you do not speak absolutely in the singular.' It is difficult to imagine a greater pathos of resignation, after the sad experiences which Gladstone had had during the unutterably painful parting audience at Windsor. These two persons, each of them a giant, inextricably tied together by political fate, ought to have parted differently. That is a thing which Victoria owed herself and her Prime Minister of so many years service, whatever her personal feelings might have been. In his farewell letter to Ponsonby, Gladstone continues with

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reminiscences of Grey, and concludes: 'But forgive me for saying you are "to the manner born"; and such a combination of tact and temper with loyalty, intelligence, and truth I cannot expect to see again. Pray remember these are words which can only pass from an old man to one much younger, though trained in a long experience.' 'Much younger,' and yet at the time Ponsonby was nearly seventy. He whose life was in his work was not permitted to die in harness. 'For almost a year good Sir Henry had been much changed; he had become so listless and silent, and his handwriting had become changed, which startled me. This became worse and worse, and at last was hardly legible.' Now, at Osborne Cottage, he had a stroke. 'Too, too sad.' The at first hoped-for recovery did not materialise, and a few months later the old General was compelled to hand in his resignation. On the same day Bigge was appointed his successor. . . .

The issue of *The Times* of November 22nd, 1895, is but one amongst hundreds and amongst thousands; in no wise is it distinguishable from those which before that day or after it reproduce the picture of England, its Empire, and its capital. On that day details were published of the Army Reforms, as a result of which the old Duke of Cambridge, the childhood companion and cousin of the Queen, was compelled to resign the office of Commander-in-Chief; Lord Roberts, appointed Field Marshal, was received by the Queen, who presented him with the baton; 2½ per cent Consols stood at 106; the market in Kaffirs closed firmly after an initial weakness; old Sir Julian Goldsmid,<sup>1</sup> a 'figure of respectability,' was sworn in a member of the Privy Council; Lionel Phillips<sup>2</sup> had opened in Johannesburg the Witwatersrand Chamber of Mines; Gladstone's introduction to *The People's Bible* was shortly to be published; in Walworth, in a Hall named after Robert Browning, who had died six years

<sup>1</sup> Sir Julian Goldsmid, a rich and highly respected financier.

<sup>2</sup> Sir Lionel Phillips (born 1855), a South African pioneer.



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before, young H. H. Asquith had made a speech on 'Social Problems'; in the Albert Hall, Adelina Patti was still singing; at the Palace Theatre, Loie Fuller was already dancing her then so modern Serpentine Dances; the Bechuana chiefs, presented by Joseph Chamberlain, had the honour of being received by their Great White Queen; they are now able to assure them at home that the old Queen is not a figment of the imagination, 'for our people said there was no such person in reality' – they know better; she does live.

Assuredly Victoria still lived, unapproachable, invisible, and active as ever, but the Victorian age had long since come to an end – definitely come to an end. Even if it had not been that day's *Times* which announced Henry Ponsonby's death.

## CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE

GENERAL SIR HENRY PONSONBY, P.C., G.C.B., K.C.B., 1825-1895

- 1825     Born in Corfu. His father, Sir Frederic Cavendish Ponsonby, cavalry officer and military author, was at the time Inspecting Field Officer in the Ionian Islands. His mother, Henriette Frances Spencer, was a daughter of the 1st Earl Spencer.
- 1842     Entered the Army.
- 1844     Lieutenant.
- 1847-58   Private Secretary and Aide-de-Camp to three successive Viceroys of Ireland - Lord Clarendon, Lord St. Germans, and Earl of Carlisle.
- 1855-56   Served through the Crimean Campaign - medal with clasp.
- 1856     Equerry to Prince Albert.
- 1861     Married Mary Elizabeth, eldest daughter of John Crocker Bulteel, grand-daughter of the Prime Minister Earl Grey; as Miss Bulteel she was Maid of Honour (see Appendix 1). (1862, Alberta Victoria born; 1864, Magdalene; 1866, John; 1867, Frederick, see pp. 304, 309; 1871, Arthur, see Appendix 2.)
- 1861-70   In Canada in command of a battalion.
- 1868     Major-General.
- 1870-95   April 8th, Private Secretary to Queen Victoria.
- 1870-71   Franco-German War.
- 1874 (until) Gladstone's first Ministry since 1868.
- 1874     Disraeli's second Ministry.
- 1878     Keeper of the Privy Purse in addition.
- 1879     K.C.B.
- 1880     P.C.
- April 19th, Beaconsfield's farewell letter to Ponsonby. Gladstone's second Ministry.

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- 1885 January 26th, death of General Gordon.  
February 5th, 'telegram *en clair*.'  
Salisbury's first Ministry.
- 1886 Gladstone's third Ministry.  
Salisbury's second Ministry.
- 1887 G.C.B.
- 1888 Queen Victoria in Berlin.  
Death of the Emperor Frederick.
- 1892 Gladstone's fourth Ministry.
- 1894 May 5th, Gladstone's farewell letter to Ponsonby.  
Rosebery's Ministry.
- 1895 January 6th, attacked by paralysis.  
May 8th, retired from his office.  
November 21st, died at Osborne Cottage, East Cowes,  
which the Queen had placed at his disposal.  
Ponsonby was buried at Whippingham.

In the Court Circular appeared: 'The Queen received early this morning with deep concern the news of the death of Sir Henry Ponsonby after a prolonged illness. Sir Henry was in his seventieth year, and served the Prince Consort and the Queen for thirty-nine years.

'Sir Henry Ponsonby was a most highly valued servant and friend of the Queen, by whom his loss is deeply deplored; and he was respected and beloved by the whole Royal Family, as well as by all members of Her Majesty's Household.'

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## APPENDIX I

### THE HONOURABLE LADY PONSONBY

was a great lady, very clever, of wide outlook and highly educated, who, from her youth up, had strong leanings towards France, and had written an essay on Pascal. She was a master in the art of conversation. 'I don't mind how heretical people are,' she used to say, 'so long as they are not tedious.' Her very liberal religious views involved her in occasional unpleasantnesses at Court, and once even in 'great disgrace, having never visited the cottagers at Abergeldie, and having only been once

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to Church.' But her position was much too strong for it to be possible for anyone to continue to show resentment. As Miss Bulteel, already she had stood in close and intimate friendship with the Queen. Victoria often complained that so few people told her the plain, unadorned truth; Mary Ponsonby was one of the few who did. Her urge always to be occupied, always to work, led her to take up arts and crafts, such as bookbinding. After her marriage she occupied no official post in the Household.

Arthur Christopher Benson described her as 'a woman with a great vigour and originality, keenly critical and discriminating, and with a singularly impressive personality.' He found in her 'a real richness and suggestiveness of mind, so that her talk was apt, liberal, full of quick allusiveness, and peculiarly refreshing from its penetrative quality.'

After Sir Henry's death, Lady Ponsonby moved to Ascot; in London she continued to live in St. James's Palace, where the life tenancy of an apartment had been granted to her.

Lady Ponsonby, who for decades had had the opportunity of seeing so many and such interesting events from the front row, has left a diary.

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## APPENDIX 2

ARTHUR PONSONBY: SINCE 1930 LORD PONSONBY OF SHULBREDE

Born 1871. Educated at Eton and Oxford.

1882-7 Page of Honour.

1894-1903 In the Diplomatic Service.

1898 Married Dorothea, d. of the late Sir Hubert Parry.

1905-8 Private Secretary to the Prime Minister, Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman.

1924 Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.

1929 Parliamentary Secretary to Ministry of Transport.

1930 Created Baron.

1931 Leader of Labour Party, House of Lords. Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster.

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### APPENDIX 3

JOHN EMERICH EDWARD DALBERG-ACTON, BARON ACTON,  
1834-1902

His mother was the daughter of the former sovereign Emerich Joseph, Duke of Dalberg.

Acton was Lecturer in Modern History at Cambridge, and on February 14th, 1895, had, on Rosebery's suggestion, been appointed Professor. 'The duties of this Chair will in no degree interfere with the discharge of his functions in Your Majesty's Household.'

The painful scene had taken place earlier, in March 1894; all the high political personalities waited in the Queen's ante-chamber, wondering with excitement who it was who would be called in to kiss hands. Acton appeared at the door and requested Sir William Harcourt to enter. The Queen, surprised and at a loss, had nothing at all to say to him - she had asked for Rosebery.

His professorship after all prevented Acton from continuing as Lord in Waiting - an office which he occupied from 1892 to 1895.

Acton was a trustee of the British Museum.

ARTHUR BIGGE,  
LORD STAMFORDHAM



ARTHUR BIGGE,  
LORD STAMFORDHAM

HOW it came about that the young Prince Imperial, the son of the Emperor Napoleon III who had died in England, joined a command in South Africa cannot be ascertained clearly and indisputably. When troops left for the war against the Zulus - amongst them officers from Woolwich, where the Prince had received his military training - he felt stirring in him the Bonaparte urge for activity and adventure, the desire to be with his comrades; 'he had,' according to the Queen's subsequent words, 'the natural wish to distinguish himself and *de faire quelque chose*.' The Beaconsfield Ministry was opposed, on political grounds, to an official participation on the part of the Prince in the operations, and refused his application to join; he was permitted to enter the war zone as a spectator and on his own responsibility. Victoria, however, with her strong interest in everything military, was impressed by the wish of the youngest Aiglon, and put everything in motion - on this occasion herself behind the Throne - to make it possible for him to take part. From the Duke of Cambridge, the Commander-in-Chief, the Prince received a letter of recommendation to Lord Chelmsford, the leader of operations, and, armed with this, he embarked at Southampton.

In Government circles there was the most painful surprise when it was learnt - only from reports in the Press - that the Prince had started. Beaconsfield, greatly worried, turned to Salisbury: 'I am quite mystified about . . . the Prince Imperial. I thought we had agreed not to sanction his adventure? Instead of that, he has Royal audiences previous to departure, is reported to be a future staff



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officer. . . .’ On the scene of hostilities the young gentleman was attached in some undefined capacity to the Royal Artillery, and received a commission. He joined the battery of Lieutenant Arthur Bigge.

The pair knew each other from their Woolwich days, and had been good comrades. The Prince had several times taken his friend to see his mother at Chislehurst; the Empress thought highly of him, and now felt a certain comfort in thinking that her son was in the company of his older and more experienced brother officer. When, however, the Prince arrived, Bigge was not with his battery but seriously ill in hospital. ‘Humanly speaking, it seemed more likely that Lieutenant Bigge would die than the other should happen,’ Victoria subsequently wrote in her diary. But it was “the other” which happened.

Under the leadership of Captain Carey, a party started to reconnoitre, and of this the Prince was a member; the troop, which was resting in a kraal without having taken the prescribed safeguards, was suddenly attacked by hostile Zulus; Carey and four out of the six soldiers survived. The Prince’s horse shied; unable to mount, he ran by its side till the reins broke. Then he fought alone against superior numbers ‘like a lion at bay,’ as the Zulus subsequently declared, and fell. Carey reported to Chelmsford at headquarters, ‘My Lord, the Prince is dead.’ Chelmsford: ‘And you – you are still alive?’ In this tragic and painful matter Carey had to be the scapegoat; he was censured by a court of inquiry, and found guilty by court martial of ‘misbehaviour before the enemy.’ Later, the event was looked on more calmly, and the very hasty judgment, dictated by the painfulness of the facts, was quashed.

In London the news of the Prince’s death had, in addition to deep regret, caused the very greatest embarrassment. Beaconsfield wrote to Lady Chesterfield: ‘He went as a mere traveller, but I fear, tho’ I do not, as yet, absolutely know it, that some indiscreet friends, in very high places,

## ARTHUR BIGGE, LORD STAMFORDHAM

gave him privately letters to Chelmsford, begging that General to place the Prince on his staff"; and with this assumption he had hit the very centre of this far from clear affair. To Lord Redesdale the Prime Minister said, 'I did all I could to stop his going, but what can you do when you have to deal with two obstinate women?' But here Disraeli was wrong. About three and a half years ago the present writer published a short article on this topic in a newspaper and sent it to Lord Stamfordham, without expecting from that much-burdened man more than a formal acknowledgment. To the author's surprise and pleasure, his lordship dealt at some length with the paragraph in which Beaconsfield's remark to Redesdale was quoted; '. . . you quote Disraeli's words, "but what can you do when you have to deal with two obstinate women?"' wrote Lord Stamfordham, and continued, 'But Disraeli was wrong in describing the Empress as being "obstinate," as Her Majesty was miserable at the idea of her son going to South Africa.' Whereas Queen Victoria admired the plucky and soldier-like spirit which induced the Prince to see military service and to join his comrades who had gone to the war, and therefore did not agree with the Government who, for political reasons, would have preferred for the Prince to remain in England.' This letter, written at the age of eighty-one from Balmoral Castle on September 11th, 1930, also characterises in a short, pregnant sentence the Queen 'who with a strong will was of the kindest nature - a great woman as well as a great Queen'; it forms a link between our own day and events which, fifty-two years before the date of the letter, had stirred Europe and which became so fateful for the then Lieutenant Bigge. . . .

Bigge had brought to England the body of the Prince, who was interred at Chislehurst by the side of his father.<sup>1</sup> 'L'intérêt est fini; il ne reste plus que le sentiment,' the Marquis de Castelbajac, one of the leaders of the Bonapartist

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix 1.

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movement, said sorrowfully, after the funeral, to the Queen, who had lost more than the hope of seeing him one day on the Throne of France ('he would have made . . . such a good Emperor for France'). In a somewhat lengthy audience which Bigge had with the Queen at Balmoral, 'the Empress's wish, indeed determination, to go to South Africa, to visit the spot where her dear son fell, which will be difficult to carry out, but not impossible,' had already been discussed in detail. To attend on a journey lasting many weeks, through inhospitable country and in the most difficult circumstances, a woman and Empress much spoilt in spite of old and recent sorrow, was an unusual and responsible task. To carry it out Victoria did not choose one of her tested servants, not one of the great number of high officials or senior officers well acquainted with country and people; it was Lieutenant Bigge who was appointed to guide and accompany the Empress Eugénie to Mozani River.<sup>1</sup>

Round about this time the Queen had a curious correspondence with Beaconsfield. One of her Grooms in Waiting had been appointed Naval Lord, and the Prime Minister 'fears that it is quite impossible for [Admiral] Sir E. Commerell to hold both his Household and his official post.' The Queen was of course ready to forgo his services, although his resignation 'is a great loss to her,' but to the information that she 'will try and get some other distinguished officer' she added the indignant remark that 'she will not stand all the *dunces* and *fools* of *rank* being thought *good enough* for Court.' Beaconsfield made the dignified reply that 'his conscience does not accuse him of ever having placed any dunce or fool near Your Majesty's person, for he can unaffectedly and sincerely say that he is of opinion they would be singularly out of their sphere.'

<sup>1</sup> The Empress remained Bigge's friend for forty years, until her death. An outward proof of Bigge's high appreciation of the confidence given to him by both crowned ladies is found in the fact that he gave his eldest daughter the names of Victoria Eugénie.

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A month later the Queen had found someone to replace the departed official, and a new Groom in Waiting was appointed; the Admiral was succeeded by a Lieutenant – Lieutenant Bigge.

Thanks to the foresight and thoughtfulness of the escort, the tragic journey to Zululand – which, in view of the Empress's strong religious feeling, was more like a pilgrimage – passed, in spite of all hardships and obstacles, smoothly and to the satisfaction of both Majesties. 'You may like to hear,' wrote Victoria to Beaconsfield, 'that I have just appointed *Capt. Bigge* as successor to poor Col. Pickard.<sup>1</sup> I believe I could not have a better. Poor Col. Pickard had *the* highest opinion of him, Sir E. Wood also; and the way in which he has arranged the Empress's very difficult journey and his intelligence, discretion, tact, and kindness have shown what he is.' *Captain Bigge* was now Assistant Private Secretary, and at the same time Assistant Privy Purse, the right hand of Ponsonby, who, like the Queen, was of the opinion that 'no one better fitted than him' could have been appointed to this post. A year later he became Equerry.

During his first fifteen years of office, Bigge, as assistant, stood in the shadow of the strong and influential personality of Ponsonby. Yet he was able, under the leadership of his chief, to make his mark personally, and collaborate at the conferences on the Franchise Bill and on the occasion of Rosebery's appointment as Prime Minister. Right from the start Bigge had opportunity for more independent activity than was given to former assistants owing to the occasional division of work: on important occasions, and for weighty negotiations, Ponsonby remained in London and Bigge took over attendance on the Sovereign and accompanied her on her travels. For her important and notable journey to Berlin the Queen took both men with her.

When the news from the sick-bed of her son-in-law, who

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix 2.

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only just succeeded in becoming Emperor, sounded more and more hopeless, the Queen decided to visit her daughter. She was accompanied by Prince and Princess Henry of Battenberg and attended by the Dowager Lady Churchill,<sup>1</sup> Harriet Phipps,<sup>1</sup> the daughter of the former Private Secretary to the Prince Consort, and by Ponsonby and Bigge.

Only once before had the Queen been in Berlin – a few months after the marriage of her daughter to the Prussian Prince Frederick William; at that time the mother had the understandable desire to assist her young and inexperienced daughter with the authority of her personality to gain a position in that strange and even mistrustful environment. This time, thirty years later, it was the Queen's task to help her daughter, now Empress, and soon to be a widow, to save what could still be saved. Salisbury did not welcome the idea of the visit, for all kinds of unpleasantness, to which the Queen might be exposed, appeared possible. Hatzfeld, the German Ambassador in London, had called on the Prime Minister and behind the Throne informed him 'that there was some anxiety among persons high in office at Berlin with respect to the meeting of Prince William,' later Emperor William II, with his august grandmother. 'It appears,' Salisbury reported to the Queen as to this confidential conversation, 'that his head is turned by his position; and the hope evidently was that Your Majesty might be induced to have a special consideration for his position,' and continued 'that all Prince William's impulses, however blamable and unreasonable, will henceforth be political causes of enormous potency.' None of these reasons, however, could influence the motherly feeling of the Queen; she had decided to see her daughter, and she insisted on carrying out her plans.

First of all the Queen called on 'dear Fritz,' whose face she finds unaltered in spite of his serious illness; 'it was very touching and sad, when he kissed me.' After breakfast

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix 3.

Mackenzie was announced, but he had nothing new to report, as through her direct correspondence with her daughter and the Ambassador Malet, as well as through the letters which Sir Henry had received from Lady Ponsonby and Colonel Swaine, she was fully informed of everything.

Subsequently the Queen drove with her suite through the scattered buildings of the 'straggling little town' of Charlottenburg, now the largest suburb of the capital, to Berlin. She remembered well from her first visit the Brandenburg Gate, the Unter den Linden Avenue, and the monument of Frederick the Great. She called on the Empress Augusta, the widow of William I, and found her in deep mourning, with a long veil, seated in a chair, 'quite crumpled up and deathly pale, really rather a ghastly sight.' Then the Queen saw for the first time the Berlin palace of her daughter, the Crown Prince's Palace, the renovation of which had not been completed on the occasion of her first visit. She liked the house and the hall, but the rooms were not good enough or big enough for the Queen's taste. The daughter of the Italian statesman Minghetti, was presented to her; in later years this lady was a distinguished member of the Continental aristocracy as Princess Buelow, the wife of the German Imperial Chancellor. Yet another lady greeted the Queen in the palace of her daughter, the Baroness Ernest Stockmar, the daughter-in-law of the man who had behind the Throne guided her first days as Queen; who, thirty years earlier, on the occasion of her first visit, had come to Berlin to be of help to her, and whose son, Baron Ernest, was the confidant of the English Court who served the young Crown Princess as Private Secretary.

The following day was remarkable for the fact that the important conversation with Bismarck, from which so much was expected, was to take place.

Once before these two great political personalities, who were amongst the strongest characters of their time, had met.

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That had been thirty-three years earlier, and the man who had presented the then Minister of the German Federation (Deutscher Bund) to the Queen had been – Napoleon at Versailles. They never cared much for each other; Bismarck regarded the English Queen as the originator of those ‘petticoat politics’ which caused him so much trouble, and the Queen saw in him an unsympathetic and inconsiderate statesman. It struck those who accompanied the Queen that Bismarck, who generally was not shy of any person or nervous in any situation, did not feel so assured as usual before the audience. Bigge, who, together with Ponsonby, received Bismarck, described the situation preceding the meeting in an interesting manner: ‘He was unmistakably nervous and ill at ease; asked whereabouts in the room the Queen would be, would she be seated or standing, etc. We both felt proud that this great man evidently realised he was about to be received by an equally great, or even a greater, woman.’ It was a pleasant surprise for the Queen to find Bismarck so congenial a man. She greeted him in a friendly manner and asked him to take a seat, a courtesy which she never extended to her English Ministers. All points of foreign politics were touched: Russia and its relation to France, the German-Austrian agreement, Austria’s fear of Russia. Then Bismarck emphasised the strength of the German Army and its excellent training, and gradually the conversation drifted to its essential subject: the illness of the Emperor Frederick and its consequences. The Queen expressed her great satisfaction that Bismarck had no intention of appointing a Regent. Thus she was comforted to hear with her own ears what the Ambassador Malet had already reported to her, namely, that the Constitutional rights of the Sovereign, although he might be fatally ill, would be safeguarded by Bismarck; this set her mind at rest. Bismarck, who was justly regarded as being unsentimental, went so far as to assure Her Majesty that, even if he thought such a representation necessary – which he did

not – ‘he would not have the heart to propose it.’ The Queen again appealed strongly to Bismarck to stand by her daughter when the unavoidable dark days should come, and Bismarck promised her to do so. Then the conversation turned to William, her grandson, who would so soon be Emperor. The Queen spoke of his inexperience, and complained that he had travelled very little. Bismarck confirmed her opinion that William knew nothing at all about civil affairs, but believed that, ‘should he be thrown into the water, he would be able to swim.’ They then spoke for a while about general matters, and, fully satisfied with their talk, took leave of each other. The extraordinary difference between these two great political personalities who met here can only be fully appreciated if we bear in mind the warfare which both conducted with their Constitutions: Bismarck, the statesman, was meant to govern, but wanted also to rule; Victoria, the Queen, had the Constitutional task to rule her country, but was of opinion that she was also meant to govern. It is impossible to imagine the two ever working together.

After this meeting the family and Court life resumed its course. The morning of the third and last day was filled with a parade under the command of the Crown Prince William, and ‘this military spectacle without her son-in-law makes’ the Queen ‘sad.’ Then the hour of departure drew near; first of all there was the parting from the Emperor, to which everybody was looking forward with anxiety, but both kept their heads up. The Queen expressed the hope of seeing her dear Fritz in England soon, when he was stronger. The Empress took great pains to be brave, but completely collapsed at the station. It was terrible for the mother to leave her daughter in such a state and to see her ‘standing there in tears while the train slowly moved off.’

Seven weeks later the Emperor Frederick was dead, and a new era in European history had begun. . . .

When, after two months of hopeless illness, Ponsonby



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found himself compelled to hand in his resignation, Bigge, who for fifteen years had been trained by him, was appointed his successor. 'She is sure,' wrote the Queen, 'that she can rely on him in every way,' and, though he had not 'the many years' experience of good Sir Henry, she can place complete confidence in him.'<sup>1</sup> Bigge, in his letter of thanks, assured her that 'the names of Grey and Ponsonby are in themselves sufficient to remind him, if needs be, of the high and honourable position' which he is now called upon to fill. 'He will ever keep the example of the latter before him. To fill his place, he knows too well, is impossible.' On the Queen's birthday, which fell a few days later, Bigge was appointed K.C.B., an honour which, two years earlier, he had 'asked for permission to decline.' (The reasons for this tactful refusal can only be guessed at: it was not till his ninth year of office that Ponsonby – who, it is true, had not been previously assistant – received this distinction.)

In the very first days of his independent occupation of his office, Bigge had to carry out a task which required extraordinary tact and great adroitness: the Duke of Cambridge was to resign his post of Commander-in-Chief.

The Queen, as Head of the Army, considered it her easiest way to control the latter through her cousin. That as a result of the Cardwell reforms he should be subordinated to a Minister, who in turn was responsible to Parliament, was already very distasteful to her. And now he was, under the new Army Scheme, requested by the Minister for War, in the name of the Prime Minister, courteously but firmly, to hand in his resignation. This the old gentleman refused to do, protested most energetically against such a demand, and had to be urged on all sides in the most formal manner not to allow the Government to be placed in an embarrassing situation. In the midst of all these discussions, which were of the most unpleasant character, and yet had some element of humour in them, stood Bigge

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix 4.

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as the confidant of the Queen. 'The one thing Sir Arthur is anxious for,' he explained in his report, 'is that the outside world should not know that H.R.H. is thus holding out. . . . It will make all so much pleasanter and more dignified for the Duke if the fact of his unfortunate attitude can be concealed, when he at last resigns.' But matters did not go through quite so simply. 'The almighty dollar,' as Campbell-Bannerman wrote to Bigge, 'has been most prominent in these recent interviews; the post of dignity having receded.' . . . During the course of this affair, which wavered between ridiculousness and distress, Rosebery also had a 'somewhat painful correspondence' with the Duke, and was desirous to avoid meeting him at a dinner. Bigge had to see to it that Rosebery, in order to have a valid excuse, should for that very evening receive a command to Windsor. And yet it was through Bigge that at the last moment an agreement with the Duke was reached; a formula which solved all difficulties was found: he 'placed himself in the Queen's hand' and stated, not 'that he desires to resign,' but only 'his willingness to resign.'

During the five years of his Private Secretaryship with the Queen, Bigge was entirely spared any negotiations on the occasion of changes of Government. When Sir Arthur took over the office on his own account, Rosebery was Prime Minister, and Salisbury's formation of his Cabinet proceeded without complications.

It fell to Bigge's lot to be permitted to advise the venerable Sovereign in all matters connected with the great Jubilee. At the start, questions arose as to the name to be given to this rare celebration. 'Jubilissimee,' 'The Queen's Year,' 'The Queen's Commemoration,' were among the suggestions. Sir Matthew Ridley, the Home Secretary, 'did not care for "Diamond Jubilee,"' as he wrote to Bigge, 'but it is not for me or the H.O. to raise objection, if the Queen has a fancy for it.' And so the name 'Diamond Jubilee' was kept to. But before that point had been reached, before the

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imperial homage of the world-wide Empire, which was far more than a Court pageant, could take place, enormous preliminary work, lasting many months, had to be done. Every official and every authority in London, in England, and in the Empire came to the Private Secretary with questions, suggestions, offers. Negotiations proceeded with the Lord Mayor and with Bishops, with Governors-General of Colonies and with Ministries, and Bigge also exchanged letters with the good Mayor of Coventry, who had asked for permission to present 'specimens of the products of the three principal industries of the city – a ribbon, a watch, and a bicycle.' Salisbury, too, found that this 'case is a difficult one,' but the good city of Coventry was informed by Bigge that 'the Queen will have much pleasure in receiving the presents you are kind enough to offer.' And, finally, Sir Arthur was able to inform the Government, the Church, and the City of London that the Queen, who at first had not quite approved of the plan, had after all consented to the open-air Te Deum in front of St. Paul's. So gradually all wishes were, as far as possible, satisfied by Bigge, and all requests granted, including that of Arthur Sullivan, who wanted to be allowed to compose a great hymn in honour of the great day. The only parties to be 'very much grieved' were the two Chancellors of the Exchequer, who had, as Bigge learnt from Salisbury, 'agreed that they would pay without stint for big Royalties and the reception of them.' And now they were inconsolable on account of the announcement of 'no crowned heads.' Both of them – Hicks-Beach and Harcourt – had to keep their money and 'weep over their crowned heads.' . . . On the 'never-to-be-forgotten day,' which represented the most comprehensive outward expression of all parts of the Empire, Bigge stood in the immediate *entourage* of his Sovereign, who was being fêted by the whole world. . . .

Things had now become calmer in the immediate vicinity of the Queen, and she herself, now really grown old,

began to take matters more quietly, to become more accessible to well-considered suggestions. For Bigge, too, an easier time had come, although manifold tasks from wide circles continued to require to be dealt with. Social problems also had to be attended to by the Private Secretary; in the immediate neighbourhood of the Castle at Windsor, grounds were found for censorious action, for the sanitary conditions of the town were in some parts on the lowest level. Bigge had to report to the Queen that 'the fact that some of the worst of these hovels are called "Victoria Cottages" is almost an insult to Your Majesty.' To these neighbourly considerations succeeded others from afar, when Bigge made the suggestion that Slatin, although not a British subject, should receive a high decoration, because 'as Governor of Darfur he struggled most loyally to uphold Egyptian authority in that province.' The Austrian became C.M.G., and the infrequent occurrence was witnessed that an individual received high distinctions from three States, together with three steps in rank: Rudolf Slatin had become Sir Rudolf von Slatin Pasha.

Everything seemed to indicate that the great and blessed reign of Victoria was intended to terminate quietly and peacefully. But Fate, not a respecter of men and their desires, had ruled otherwise. The Jameson Raid was the first note, followed by the Kruger telegram, which Knollys, in a letter to Bigge, calls 'a most gratuitous act of unfriendliness' on the part of William II. 'But independently of all this,' the letter continues, 'the Prince of Wales would like to know what business the Emperor had to send any message at all. . . . What the Emperor has done . . . is unnecessary and unfriendly. H.R.H. only hopes he will not come to Cowes this year.' All this was but the prelude. The roar of the distant cannon in the Boer War gave the Victorian age an inharmonious closing chord – and all the suffering which arose out of the Kruger telegram and followed on it entailed, eighteen years later, the end of the old Europe.

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The Diamond Jubilee festivities seemed to have endowed the Queen with a new lease of life; in spite of all ups and downs and disappointments, she followed with unfailing optimism all the movements of her troops, and stirred up the authorities in London when the *tempo* of the latter seemed to her too slow. Bigge, as representative of the Queen, stood in the centre of the manifold, complicated, and sometimes confused negotiations between the Army and the Government. If we look through the *Letters* of this period, we meet Bigge's name on almost every page, and we are amazed at the enormous amount of work which the Private Secretary had to get through. The change in the Supreme Command, when Lord Roberts, with Kitchener at his side, was called to South Africa; the peace mediations on the initiative of William II – all these meant days of greater labour, which made the most extensive calls on the foresight and the tact of the personal adviser. And, above all, Bigge was engaged in re-editing, under Victoria's direction, a Form of Intercession drawn up by the Archbishop of Canterbury for use during the war (1900). Hopetoun wittily said, 'What an occupation for a gunner! He ought to be made a Minor Can(n)on!' It must have been like a holiday for Bigge when he was able to carry the Zavertal Case to its conclusion and see that Mr. Ladislao Zavertal, the bandmaster of the Royal Artillery, received a well-earned commission – the honorary rank of a second lieutenant. Bigge's endorsement on the cutting from the *London Gazette*, 'At last,' can easily be understood, for it had taken eighteen months before the various authorities were agreed and a precedent for bandmasters had been created. But Sir Arthur's exertions were richly rewarded by an exuberant letter of thanks from the new Lieutenant Zavertal to Bigge when he held the commission, with 'the most precious signature of the Queen,' in his hands, and in his joy 'can hardly realise that it is really mine.' . . . And all the time the guns thundered on by the Vaal River. . . .

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The Queen's diary on January 1st, 1901, begins with the mournful words, 'Another year begun, and I am feeling so weak and unwell that I enter upon it sadly.' On the following day Roberts, just back from Africa, attended by the present Lord Derby, reported to his Sovereign at Osborne, who bestowed on him Garter and Earldom. But after the Audience the Queen 'felt a little tired' and 'rested and slept for awhile.' On January 4th, Salisbury was obliged to write to Bigge that it was impossible to comply with his suggestion and request not to appoint any kind of 'Committee to inquire into the conduct of the South African War,' for 'pledges that a full inquiry would be accorded were so distinct, and were so often repeated, that it may be impossible to treat them with entire disregard,' and so another of the many, many wishes of the old Royal Lady was incapable of fulfilment. On the 9th, Brodrick submitted to Sir Arthur on behalf of the Queen a list with suggested decorations for the brave troops.

Chamberlain – the Right Hon. Joseph Chamberlain – was the last visitor of whom the diary speaks; surely never in the days of his Radical youth can he even have dreamt of ever appearing at Court, and now he was *persona gratissima*. Nothing shows more clearly the enormous changes which had long since taken place; twenty years earlier it had required an express statement by Gladstone that Chamberlain 'had never spoken against' the Queen or the Royal Family, 'or had expressed Republican views,' to make him at all acceptable to the Queen. Now it was the name of the Imperialistic Chamberlain, with a seat in the Tory Ministry, which, far more than that of Salisbury, had impressed its seal on the Queen's last years. . . . Four days after the visit of the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Roberts, the aged fighter for Queen and country, called again for a few minutes, and it seems symbolical that these two pillars of the Empire should have been the last to be received by the Queen. 'A good telegram from Kitchener' closed the 10th of January.

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A few more carriage drives were possible for the August Lady. On January 13th, a Sunday, she made the entry that she had 'had a fair night, but was a little wakeful.' She took part in the Divine Service, which was held in the Drawing Room, and which was 'a great comfort.' 'Rested again afterwards, then did some signing, and dictated to Lenchen.' Thus ends the Queen's diary, which she opened on August 1st, 1832, and closed on this January 13th, 1901, 'active and at work until her last day.'

The end came in a kindly ebbing away - 'the Queen is slowly sinking.' . . . On January 22nd the venerable Sovereign, 'a great woman and a great Queen,' passed away. . . .

Bigge had served Victoria for twenty years. . . .

Edward VII, among whose great qualities were gratitude and appreciation, kept as far as possible after his accession the old staff who had served him for many years as Prince of Wales. Bigge was appointed Extra Equerry of the new Monarch and Private Secretary to the Heir Apparent. At the age of fifty-two a new epoch began for him under the Queen's grandson. He accompanied the latter on his great travels, first on his Empire tour on board the *Ophir*, then on his first journey to India, and was again at his new master's side when he, who in the meantime had ascended the Throne, visited the Indian Empire for the second time. This was the first occasion in history on which this great dependency was visited by a reigning British Sovereign, the King and Kaisar-i-Hind.

When Bigge stood again at the side of a reigning Monarch, much had altered in the nine years of the rule of Edward VII; not only had the outer face of London and England become different, the points of view of men and women had changed. Then the World War shook the country to its foundations, and new moving forces arose with which the Sovereign and his personal adviser had to come to terms. The man who by virtue of his position came into daily contact with the Monarch, to advise him and on

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his behalf to keep in constant touch with the Government, was faced by completely new combinations and by problems for which there was no precedent. The wide experience and immense knowledge of affairs of Arthur Bigge, now Lord Stamfordham, were bound to be a priceless asset for George V, and such they proved to be. He was in the service of the Throne in the days long past when Gladstone stood in the prime of his power; he had stood at the centre of events during the struggles between Lords and Commons, during the innumerable fights over Home Rule, and was still in office when the Irish Free State came into being. Twelve years after the Great War which robbed him of his only son and the heir to the title, Stamfordham was still at work in the second year of the Labour Ministry. During this time the 'serenity of his period of office has been discernible even from afar.'

The fundamental change in the relations between the Monarch and the Government Executive was another matter which Stamfordham had to take into consideration. Under the arrangement of the Imperial Conference, the Prime Ministers of the Dominions now also had the right to tender advice direct to the Sovereign; for the personal adviser this meant a completely new study of the situation. In the interpretation of the Constitution, always adaptable, there were also constantly new points of view to be put forward. Whilst, during the first third of the past century, the Prime Ministers belonged chiefly to the House of Lords, under Victoria those belonging to the House of Commons nearly levelled matters up, Russell and Disraeli having sat in both Houses. In present times, however, since the resignation of Salisbury – that is, for thirty-two years – no Prime Minister has sat in the House of Lords. Until the resignation of Bonar Law there was no obstacle to a peer again moving to No. 10 Downing Street, but at that time it was Lord Stamfordham's 'unpalatable task,' in a scene which must attract the dramatist's art, to inform Lord Curzon



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of this decision. As the Labour Party had now become the official Opposition, and was – at that time – not represented in the House of Lords, only a Commoner could be entrusted with the formation of a Government. Curzon, struck to the very roots of his being, tried to negotiate with the adviser and representative of the King; ‘he asked to submit for consideration’ whether it was not possible to arrive at a different decision, whether all points had been in fact fully weighed, all possibilities exhausted, and was in utter despair when Stamfordham had to meet all his objections with the words, ‘Too late,’ and tell him that Baldwin had already been summoned to the Palace. Curzon looked upon the decision as a verdict by which he had missed the aim of his whole life. His conversation with Stamfordham is recorded in excited pencil notes: ‘Such was the reward I received for nearly forty years of public service in the highest offices; such was the manner in which it was intimated to me that the cup of honourable ambition had been dashed from my lips, and that I could never aspire to fill the highest office in the service of the Crown.’

It cannot lie within the scope of this book to discuss the great landmarks which constitute the reign of His present Majesty. These events are too near us, their development is still too much in progress, to make it possible for us to examine occurrences which belong to temporary history, and will not come into general history till later.

The grave and prolonged illness of his Royal master had filled the ageing man with the deepest anxiety; during the critical days he felt strongly both his responsibility and his duty, and never even thought of rest for himself, being at his post day and night. The happy satisfaction was given him subsequently of seeing the King recovered and strengthened and returned to regular work.

The editor of the *Letters*, who had throughout enjoyed the advantage of Lord Stamfordham’s advice and intimate knowledge, about this time published a further

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volume; they expressed their gratitude and appreciation for this valuable help in the following words: 'The outstanding name is once more that of Lord Stamfordham, who steadfastly carried on under King George the traditions learnt under Queen Victoria.' The thirty years which had elapsed since the death of the Queen, Arthur Bigge, Baron Stamfordham, had spent in standing in 'impartial sagacity' at the side of George V, ready to assume responsibility and be active; and when he died, in harness, he had stood for 'fifty years in the very shadow of the British Throne.'

## CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE

LIEUTENANT-COLONEL SIR ARTHUR JOHN BIGGE,  
FIRST BARON STAMFORDHAM,

P.C., G.C.B., G.C.I.E., G.C.V.O., K.C.S.I., K.C.M.G., D.S.O.,  
GRAND OFFICIER DE LA LÉGIION D'HONNEUR

- 1849 Born; son of Rev. John F. Bigge, Vicar of Stamfordham, Northumberland.  
Military training, Woolwich.
- 1869 Royal Artillery.
- 1878-79 Served in the Zulu War; mentioned in despatches (Battle of Kambula Hill); medal with clasp; A.D.C. to Field Marshal Sir Evelyn Wood.
- 1879 (June) Prince Imperial killed.  
Returned with the Prince's body from South Africa.  
October 29th, audience with the Queen.
- 1880-81 Groom in Waiting.
- 1880 Attended the Empress Eugénie to Zululand.
- 1880-95 Assistant Private Secretary.  
Assistant Keeper of the Privy Purse.
- 1881 Equerry.  
Married Constance, daughter of Rev. William F. Neville.
- 1885 C.B.
- 1887 C.M.G.
- 1888 April 24th to 26th, Queen Victoria in Berlin.  
June 15th, Emperor Frederick III died.
- 1895 January 6th, Ponsonby attacked by paralysis.  
May 8th, Ponsonby resigned.  
„ Bigge appointed Private Secretary.  
May 24th, K.C.B.  
June 21st, Announcement of the Duke of Cambridge's resignation.  
Rosebery Government defeated.

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- 1895 July 1st, Salisbury's third Ministry.  
November 21st, Ponsonby died.
- 1896 December 24th, Jameson Raid; Kruger telegram.
- 1897 June 22nd, Diamond Jubilee.
- 1898 Retired from Army with rank of Lieutenant-Colonel.
- 1899-1902 Boer War.
- 1901 January 22nd, Queen Victoria died.
- 1901-10 Equerry to King Edward VII.
- 1901-30 Private Secretary to King George V. (1901, Duke of York; 1902, Prince of Wales; 1910, His present Majesty.)
- 1901 Accompanied the then Duke of York (George V) on his Empire Tour.
- 1902 G.C.V.O., K.C.M.G.
- 1905 Accompanied the then Prince of Wales (George V) on his first Indian Tour.
- 1910 Accession of H.M. King George V.  
P.C.  
Breakdown of negotiations about Parliament Bill.
- 1911 Created Lord Stamfordham.  
Accompanied H.M. King George V on his second Indian Tour.
- 1913 Constitutional Crisis.
- 1914-18 The Great War.
- 1915 Lord Stamfordham's only son, Captain the Hon. John Neville Bigge, a promising officer in the King's Royal Rifle Corps, was killed in France.
- 1916 Rebellion in Ireland.  
H. H. Asquith, Prime Minister since 1908, resigned.  
D. Lloyd George's Ministry.
- 1918 Parliamentary Reform Act.
- 1920 Empress Eugénie died.
- 1922 Lady Stamfordham died.  
A. Bonar Law's Ministry.
- 1923 May, Negotiations with Lord Curzon.  
Stanley Baldwin's Ministry.
- 1924 J. Ramsay MacDonald's Ministry.  
Stanley Baldwin's Ministry.

## BEHIND THE THRONE

- 1926 Imperial Conference.  
1928 November, beginning of the grave and prolonged illness of His Majesty.  
1929 J. Ramsay MacDonald's Ministry.  
1931 March 31st, Lord Stamfordham died.

He left surviving him two daughters, the Hon. Victoria Eugénie Adeane, and the Hon. Margaret Bigge. No heir to the peerage.

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### APPENDIX 1

A suggestion was made to erect a monument in Westminster Abbey to the Prince Imperial, who is buried with his father, Napoleon III, at Chislehurst. The accompanying circumstances are probably not in the memory of many people. The suggestion was refused in the House of Commons, which 'greatly shocked and disgusted' the Queen. According to her view, 'a monument to him' would have been 'a proud and worthy addition to Westminster Abbey. But where is chivalry and delicacy of feeling to be found in these days amongst many of the Members of Parliament?' In a letter to the Napoleon Memorial Committee, which on its own initiative had already withdrawn the suggestion, Stanley, the Dean of Westminster, denied the right of Parliament to decide on such a question; he explained that 'it was for the Sovereign to command or forbid the interment or commemoration of any person in the Chapel,' and ended, 'But your Committee have rightly judged that a proposed honour, met in a temper so unlike to that in which it was offered, would lose its gracious intention.' The Memorial by Edgar Boehm was erected in St. George's Chapel, Windsor, 'a fitter and safer place,' as the much hurt Queen added.

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### APPENDIX 2

LIEUTENANT-COLONEL ARTHUR FREDERICK PICKARD,  
R.A., V.C., C.B., 1841-1880

1860-61 }  
1863-64 } New Zealand Campaigns

## ARTHUR BIGGE, LORD STAMFORDHAM

1871-77 Equerry to the Duke of Connaught.

1878-80 Groom in Waiting.

Assistant Private Secretary and Assistant Privy Purse.

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### APPENDIX 3

JANE LADY CHURCHILL, V. & A. 3RD CLASS, 1826-1900

Daughter of the 2nd Marquess Conyngham and Lady Jane Paget, daughter of the 1st Marquess of Anglesey.

1849 Married the 2nd Lord Churchill.

1854 (since) Lady of the Bedchamber.

1900 December 25th, died, after forty-six years of service, not quite one month before her Royal Mistress.

HON. HARRIET LEPEL PHIPPS, V. & A. 4TH CLASS

Second daughter of Colonel the Hon. Sir Charles Phipps.

1862-89 Maid of Honour.

1889 (from) Woman of the Bedchamber.

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### APPENDIX 4

Simultaneously with the appointment of Bigge as Private Secretary, Sir Fleetwood Edwards was appointed Keeper of the Privy Purse.

LIEUTENANT-COLONEL THE RIGHT HON. SIR FLEETWOOD  
ISHAM EDWARDS, P.C., G.C.V.O., 1842-1910

1863 Royal Engineers.

1867-69 A.D.C. to Major-General Sir Frederick Chapman.

1875-78 A.D.C. to General Sir Lintorn Simmons, accompanying him to the Berlin Congress, 1878.

1878-80 Extra Groom in Waiting.

1878-95 Assistant Private Secretary and Assistant Privy Purse.

1880-95 Groom in Waiting.

## BEHIND THE THRONE

1888-1901 Extra Equerry.

1895-1901 Keeper of the Privy Purse.

1901-10 Extra Equerry and Serjeant-at-Arms, House of Lords.

Sir Fleetwood enjoyed the Queen's confidence to such a degree that she appointed him as her executor, the only one outside the Royal Family. In political matters he was not outstanding.

PRIVATE SECRETARIES, THE  
PERSONAL ADVISERS TO  
THE SOVEREIGN





## PRIVATE SECRETARIES, THE PERSONAL ADVISERS TO THE SOVEREIGN

THE death of Prince Albert affected the Queen in two ways; she lost her husband, the head of her numerous family, and also her adviser during twenty years of the closest communion and collaboration; after having been at first condemned to an unproductive inactivity, the Prince Consort had succeeded in asserting himself, and had finally influenced every decision of his Royal wife. Not only in the despair of her initial sorrow, but years later, Victoria clung to the past, and tried – ‘the best councillors are the dead’ – to shape her every course as her departed dear one would have wished. The *husband was irreplaceable* – and many things about the Queen which at first sight seem inexplicable can be explained when we remember that to one and twenty years of marriage followed forty years of widowhood. But the *adviser could be replaced*, and had to be replaced at the earliest possible moment. Every day brought new tasks which had to be fulfilled; the great machine could not, and dared not, stand still. The disinclination of the Sovereign even to show herself in her sorrow, or to communicate with the outside world and the Government Departments, had to be overcome. In spite of every consideration for the Queen, and with all respect for the personal blow which had fallen on her, it became necessary to make it clear to her with as much tact as possible that private mourning must give way to her Royal duties. It was an impossible position that the Sovereign should refuse to receive the Ministers, and should leave it to Sir Charles Phipps to undertake the communications with them. It was obvious that

## BEHIND THE THRONE

those who had to bear the Constitutional responsibility could not possibly agree to such a course; a memorandum was drawn up in which it was set out that it was impossible for the Ministers 'to transact business in this unofficial way.' The Earl of Malmesbury, Lord Privy Seal, judged that their action was, 'though right, certainly cruel under present circumstances,' but – it had to be so, and it was so. One way out, and one only, would possibly have been open for the Queen to enable her to escape this constant conflict between sentiment and duty: she might have for a time appointed Albert Edward as her representative. With such an obvious solution the Cabinet would in all probability have been more in accord than with one which again entailed a strengthening of the irresponsible influence behind the Throne. The Stockmar era was over; no one on the other side of St. James's Park wished to see a repetition. As, therefore, the Sovereign could not take one path and would not take the other, there remained nothing but to get on with it – and this succeeded. Helps did his utmost to get together an Assembly which just met Constitutional requirements and, with the aid of the goodwill which was present on all sides, could be taken to be a Privy Council. The ice was broken and the first step taken; a transition had been found. But the urgent need had become apparent to place by the Queen's side personal advisers of the very first rank and order.

Even during the lifetime of Prince Albert, who for twenty years had in reality been the Private Secretary of his Royal Consort, there were at call, to outward appearance in *his* service, capable men of firm character who were in a position to advise, prepare, and assist actively in arriving at decisions. Now such men were even more needed to help the female Sovereign, to relieve her of work. Just as it is no advantage to a great commercial undertaking that the main head should spend too much time in unproductive labour, so it is of not the slightest interest to

## PRIVATE SECRETARIES

a country that the Sovereign should be busy attending to things which others can do at least as well. All the time spent at the writing-table is so much loss to useful activities. Persons had therefore to be called in on whom the Queen could rely implicitly, and in whom the same measure of reliance could be placed by Ministers. Lastingly to keep the Ministerial trust was even more difficult than to gain – initially – the Royal confidence; the Ministers changed, and consequently to a certain extent the basic political point of view which governed the conduct of affairs. The Private Secretary, however – the organ, and only the organ, of the Monarch – remained, and in order to be able to remain it was imperative for him to have no political hue. There had to be assumed as regards the personal adviser the same detachment as is expected from the Speaker: at the very instant in which the latter takes the Chair he ceases to be either Tory or Whig, and he must forget which party raised him to his office. From the Private Secretary of the Sovereign also it must be demanded that he shall have no politics, and shall show no bias in his political work; he must not even remember that he has ever belonged to a party, and certainly not to which. ‘That he should be self-effacing is the first and last requirement of his office.’ Disraeli had the very greatest confidence in Sir Henry, of the great Whig family of the Ponsonbys: ‘I can only say that I could not wish my case stated to the Queen better than her Private Secretary does it. Perhaps I am a gainer by his Whiggishness, as it makes him more scrupulously on his guard to be always absolutely fair and lucid.’ And, as Gladstone also expressed his appreciation of the complete impartiality of Ponsonby, it may be said that to a certain extent Sir Henry was the ideal type of Private Secretary who had been able ‘to efface his own views and wishes in the Queen’s sovereign will.’ And in the same way, standing above all suspicion, Ponsonby’s predecessors and successors regarded their office. When, during the reign of His present

## BEHIND THE THRONE

Majesty, at the time of a serious political crisis party feeling was running very high, doubts were expressed, at a meeting of politicians from all camps, as to whether Lord Stamfordham was really the right man to advise the King without being prejudiced by his own Tory leanings. One of the Liberal leaders replied to the doubter: 'You can rule out that possibility. It is as unthinkable that Arthur Bigge should cheat at this game as that Arthur Balfour should cheat at cards.'

The office of Private Secretary to the Sovereign was of far greater importance than was generally assumed. Rosebery even considered it 'the most important in public service.' The demands which were made on this official were in every respect extraordinarily great, and to be able to meet them required the full powers of a strong character. One great advantage belonged to the position of the personal adviser to the Sovereign, distinguishing it from other great positions: the work was not submerged in the network of a great organisation, and the bearer of the office, who had no other superior, could be assured of the appreciation of his only chief, the Sovereign. But, apart from a few exceptions, the appreciation of the Sovereign was all. Fame or any merit recorded in history did not accompany the office. However great may have been the share of a Private Secretary in the achievement, however strong may have been his influence, he ever stood in the shadow of him for whom he toiled and laboured; he always remained anonymous. The Minister himself *makes* history; the Private Secretary *assists* the Sovereign to make history. Between these two Constitutional exponents the Private Secretary is the absolutely necessary link, but yet only a link. Not only does the personal adviser of the Sovereign rarely figure in history, but in the nature of things he is also practically unknown to the nation at large. Even those who collaborated in the great Government workshop were often unable to recognise what share the Private Secretary had taken in the messages



EVELYN ASHLEY

*Vanity Fair*



## PRIVATE SECRETARIES

coming from the Palace. In the exceedingly difficult and complicated question of the Disestablishment of the Irish Church, the share of General Grey went far beyond the mere shaping of the drafts; both the development and the result were most strongly influenced by him. After any negotiations with the messenger of the Queen, Salisbury often asked himself, 'I wonder how much of this is from the Queen and how much from Ponsonby?' – or Bigge, according to whichever of the two had just left him. If in such cases the adviser, covered by his principal, on his own initiative asserted new points of view, then, although irresponsible, he assumed at least moral responsibility. But an implicitly loyal servant will never do or cause anything for which he is not at any time ready to answer, even if he has not to bear the responsibility in a Constitutional sense.

From the time of her accession to the death of the Prince Consort – that is, for the first four and twenty years of her reign – the Queen did not in fact have an official 'unofficial adviser.' But the difficult situation after Albert's death was made appreciably easier for her by the fact that it was not necessary to seek properly trained servants, because there stood at her disposal those 'who were well equipped for aiding her in the transaction of public business.' Phipps and General Grey were men 'who had training in affairs of State, and were thus qualified to deal on Her Majesty's behalf with statesmen.'

Thus Phipps and Grey became the Queen's first Private Secretaries without the official designation to which they were entitled. Owing to the absence of precedents, it was not till six years later that Grey's appointment was made officially and gazetted, together with that of Biddulph, who, as Keeper of the Privy Purse, must also be included in the advisory staff. Phipps did not live long enough to receive the official appointment.

'Good, excellent Grey,' whose 'discretion, sense, and courage made him invaluable,' was succeeded by Henry



## BEHIND THE THRONE

Ponsonby, who for nearly a generation was the confidant and adviser of the Queen. Only the publication of the *Letters* showed how great and comprehensive a part Ponsonby played. Victoria's last Private Secretary was Arthur Bigge, Lord Stamfordham, who survived his Sovereign for thirty years, and died holding the same office under His present Majesty. . . .

In the number of the *Quarterly Review* published immediately after the death of the Queen appeared a contribution dealing with the position of the Private Secretaries. This article, the authorship of which was attributed to the most varied persons – Lady Ponsonby was amongst those mentioned – contains a remarkable paragraph: 'This staff, never officially acknowledged in the fullness of its functions, had to exercise the most complete self-effacement, and became, in effect, an expansion of the Queen's personal power in action. The watchword of the lives of her Private Secretaries was devotion to the will of the Queen. The secret of the power they exercised was faithfully kept from the public, and will always be kept. These men gave their lives to her service, without demur or reserve, and it is as much to her honour as it is to theirs that she inspired such complete devotion in men of such remarkable gifts.'

Assuredly, if we look at the long line of the personal advisers, first in the service of the Prince, then in that of the Queen, starting with George Anson and finishing with Lord Stamfordham, we cannot but feel how extraordinarily lucky Victoria was in her helpful collaborators, what an immense amount of knowledge of men she showed in their selection. Without friction, without the slightest serious incident which might have been put down to the Private Secretary and his activities, the relations with ten different Prime Ministers in twenty successive Governments ran their course. Nothing happened which occupied, or even could have occupied, public opinion. Gladstone, 'the stiffest of sticklers for official reticence,' was of the opinion that a

## PRIVATE SECRETARIES

Cabinet Minister could tell the greatest secrets, in addition to his wife, to his Private Secretary. The former did not always observe the necessary discretion, and members of the Cabinet themselves did not always keep to the limits mentioned by Gladstone. The Private Secretaries to the Sovereign never uttered so much as one indiscreet word.

Even in quiet times the service of the Queen, who was a great and punctual worker, was not easy. It became much more difficult in later years, when with increasing age the August Lady developed more and more leanings towards autocracy, and dislike for certain of her Ministers. The very greatest demands were made on her personal advisers when, at times of serious Ministerial crises, the Queen could not be induced to vary by even one day the plans she had made as to her change of residence. When Disraeli, amongst all kinds of obstacles, formed his first Ministry, the Queen was at Osborne, and when in the same year Gladstone assembled his first Cabinet, she was at Windsor. It was therefore comparatively easy for Grey, although Osborne could not very easily or quickly be reached. But when for the first time Gladstone was replaced by Salisbury, and the change of Ministry took on the form of a crisis, it was impossible to persuade the Queen to shorten her stay at Balmoral – 570 miles from London – by so much as one day, because it happened to be Ascot week, and the unrest of coming and going connected therewith might possibly have disturbed her at Windsor! As for a stay in London, no one would have dared to suggest it. Ponsonby, hard driven and laden with responsibility, went through difficult times.

The sphere of activities of the Private Secretaries had no definitely fixed limits, and comprised, in addition to the work of the Sovereign, everything which touched the Queen and interested her. Further, there were the ever-increasing demands on the part of the Royal Family,

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who expressed wishes, asked for advice and for help in difficult situations. The Secretaries had to read the whole of the correspondence received, with the exception of the purely family letters, to report on it, and to be prepared to answer every question for detailed information. They drafted the replies, and kept up-to-date minutes as to all happenings. The fact that all the Private Secretaries of the Queen were chosen from amongst officers is a proof of her strong interest in everything concerning the Army and Navy.

'Not till many years have passed,' says, in closing, the above-mentioned article in the *Quarterly Review*, 'will the real work of the Private Secretaries be fully known, but history is sure to confirm the verdict that, whatever their duties may ultimately prove to have been, they carried them out with complete self-effacement.' The idea expressed in this paragraph, which gives the impression that perhaps it was somewhat strongly influenced by the author's personal sentiments, can be approved only subject to one complementary qualification. Outstanding as were the men who advised the Queen, who were her eyes and her ears and spoke in her name, yet with few exceptions they lacked the creative gift, and it would be a mistake to think that the office of Private Secretary to the Sovereign offered no opportunity for the exercise of that quality. All these men did excellent work in their own sphere, which, however, was not on a high level, and which raised only a few to a pinnacle. For this reason, then, they threw no shadow on the sensitive paper on which the Muse of History portrays great personalities for posterity to see. 'With complete self-effacement' they did undeniable service to country and Sovereign, and especially in the promotion of the monarchic idea. And yet it may be possible that, unobtrusive and invisible as their work and achievements were, their greatest merit lay, not in propounding, but in the impalpable, in preventing.

## PRIVATE SECRETARIES TO PRINCE ALBERT

George Anson	.	.	1840-47
Treasurer	.	.	1847-49
Charles Phipps	.	.	1847-49
Treasurer	.	.	1849-61
General Grey	.	.	1849-61

## PRIVATE SECRETARIES TO THE QUEEN

General Grey	.	..	.	1867-70
Henry Ponsonby	.	.	.	1870-95
Arthur Bigge	.	.	.	1895-1901
(1901-1931, Private Secretary to His present Majesty.)				

## KEEPERS OF THE QUEEN'S PRIVY PURSE

Henry Wheatley	.	.	1837-47
George Anson	.	.	1847-49
Charles Phipps	.	.	1849-66
General Grey (jointly)	.	.	1866
Thomas Biddulph (jointly)	.	.	1866
„ „ (alone)	.	.	1867-78
Henry Ponsonby	.	.	1878-95
Fleetwood Edwards	.	.	1895

## QUEEN VICTORIA'S PRIME MINISTERS

- 1837     June 20th, accession of Queen Victoria.  
           Viscount Melbourne Prime Minister since April 1835  
           (second and last Ministry)
- 1841     August, Sir Robert Peel (second Ministry)
- 1846     June, Lord John Russell (first Ministry)
- 1852     February, Earl of Derby (first Ministry)
- 1852     December, Earl of Aberdeen
- 1855     February, Viscount Palmerston (first Ministry)
- 1858     February, Earl of Derby (second Ministry)
- 1859     June, Viscount Palmerston (second Ministry)
- 1865     October, Earl Russell (second Ministry)
- 1866     June, Earl of Derby (third and last Ministry)
- 1868     February, Benjamin Disraeli (first Ministry)
- 1868     December, W. E. Gladstone (first Ministry)
- 1874     February, Benjamin Disraeli (1876 Earl of Beacons-  
           filed) (second Ministry)
- 1880     April, W. E. Gladstone (second Ministry)
- 1885     June, Marquess of Salisbury (first Ministry)
- 1886     January, W. E. Gladstone (third Ministry)
- 1886     February, Marquess of Salisbury (second Ministry)
- 1892     August, W. E. Gladstone (fourth and last Ministry)
- 1894     March, Earl of Rosebery
- 1895     June, Marquess of Salisbury (third and last - until  
           August 1902)
- 1901     January 22nd, death of Queen Victoria

PRIVATE SECRETARIES TO  
CABINET MINISTERS



## PRIVATE SECRETARIES TO CABINET MINISTERS

THE position of Private Adviser to the Sovereign, with a single principal – the Sovereign – must of necessity be entirely different from the relations which exist between a Minister and his Secretary; the latter are less ceremonious and more intimate, occasionally even fraternal, and are influenced by a common interest not only in the work but also in the party. The right-hand men of the Ministers are party men, those of the Sovereign are the more useful the more they have forgotten that there is even such a thing as a party. The position of Secretary to a Minister is a start in life, the stepping-stone to a higher and more important office in the Civil Service; that of Secretary to a Sovereign is the end of a distinguished career. Since the accession of the Queen – that is, for roughly a hundred years – all the Private Secretaries to the Sovereign have, with one exception (Lord Knollys, who retired), died in office, so that it is impossible to say whether they would have been able subsequently to have occupied any other office, and, if so, which. Nearly all have been originally Army officers, and then held positions from which they brought to their new office experience in dealing with affairs. The antecedents of the Private Secretaries to Ministers differed widely; they had the most varied origins, but can be divided into two main classes: (1) those who entered upon their office armed with knowledge, who were able and willing to work; (2) those who, possessed of smartness and social position, knew little or nothing, and had not the slightest inclination to work particularly hard. These pleasant, well-brought-up, and well-dressed young gentlemen wanted



## BEHIND THE THRONE

patronage for their future political career, but were themselves in a position to exercise patronage in another direction. For them there was no need to acquire quickly a thorough training; their wish was to enjoy themselves while young, and they could afford to wait until somehow, somewhere, there should be an opportunity to drop into a higher post. In the meantime their main object was to have grand and impressive titles which they could put on their visiting-cards, and to become cogs in the great Government machine; true, at first only unimportant and subordinate cogs; but, as they bore names which placed them in the great tradition, they had from the start the reversion to a career in one department or another. Individually, they often gave the impression of a kind of *édition de luxe* of Dickens's 'political young gentleman,' who, being a Tory, had 'usually some vague ideas about Ireland . . . which he cannot very clearly explain, but which he knows are the right sort of thing' and who 'knows that the Constitution is somehow Church and State, and Church and State somehow the Constitution.' Among them were young gentlemen whose fathers had deserved well of the party and its chest, and who now presented the bill in the desire of finding billets for their sons. On one occasion Lord Granville, 'in obedience to political pressure,' had to appoint such an offspring as his Private Secretary. This chip of the old block had gained his business experience only in the office of his father; during the first days of his secretarial activity a bundle of letters was placed in his hand with the request to acknowledge their receipt - 'you know, of course, the ordinary form of acknowledgment, and say that the matter will be attended to.' He did *not* know, and wrote, 'Dear Sirs, Your esteemed favour of yesterday's date duly to hand and contents noted. Our Lord Granville has your matter in hand.' . . . If the chief was a plain man in small circumstances, who lacked social experience and polish, and in his Ministerial position saw himself faced with social obligations to meet which

## PRIVATE SECRETARIES

the young Secretary had acquired the knowledge in his nursery or soon after, then not only the esteem, but also the patronage, was mutual. It is this kind of Private Secretary of whom it was said that 'he is one who has somebody to write his letters for him.' *Punch*, in his irony, not long ago went even further, and spoke of 'one of the second Secretaries' assistant secretaries.' The less use they were in the office, the more they were called upon by their chief for personal services; they had to attend to all sorts of matters, and legend relates that on one occasion a Private Secretary refused to carry out an allotted task when he was requested to attend to the sharpening of the Minister's razors. Under Palmerston there was an open rebellion when, in one of the many reorganisations of the Foreign Office, he decreed that the Private Secretaries were not, as hitherto, to be summoned by a messenger, but had to appear on the ringing of a bell. This innovation was looked upon by them as a blow to their prestige, and they rebelled – with one exception – Odo Russell (Lord Ampthill) – and he actually rose to be an Ambassador. . . . And, even if these young gentlemen spent but a few hours every day at the office, still they became used to the atmosphere, and could observe with their own eyes that even in the highest Government Departments only water was used for cooking. But, above all, they could see *how* things were done – until eventually they were able to do them on their own initiative, and, untroubled with too much expert knowledge, but armed with common sense, could themselves somewhere become chiefs and govern. It would be a great mistake and a delusion to under-estimate the influence of this class of Private Secretaries behind the Throne.

It is quite a different material, however, which goes to the making of the real, the efficient Private Secretary. Equipped with wide expert knowledge, these men are in a position to fill the post of Chief of the Staff to their employer, always able to represent him, to give information in his

## BEHIND THE THRONE

place, and to make urgent decisions in accordance with his own intentions. In order to be able to achieve this, they must be informed 'on every matter which is of interest to their chief, must be true collaborators. They are the better able to do justice to their post the less they feel that they are an executory organ and the more they look upon themselves as lieutenants of the Minister. For the efficient Private Secretary it is not enough to be fully conversant with the purely departmental matters—for these the Permanent Secretaries are at the Minister's disposal; beyond these parochial affairs he must form the living link with the other Government Departments, must keep up good relations with everyone in Whitehall and Westminster; and, if in the service of the Prime Minister, must keep in touch with his colleague in the Sovereign's employ. It is in this way that E. W. Hamilton and Montagu Corry were able to shield their respective masters, Gladstone and Disraeli.

The Ministerial Private Secretary's knowledge must also extend to many apparent trifles which are sometimes of extraordinary importance; he must be thoroughly acquainted with the details of the complicated ritual of correspondence, must know when letters should be written in the first person and when in the third, whether it is sufficient if his chief signs the letter or if he ought to copy it from the draft with his own hand. And, if it is at all possible, the Personal Secretary should also write 'a good round distinct hand,' such as the Queen liked to see and demanded. Murray, first with Gladstone, later with Rosebery, possessed this beautiful handwriting and was able to help his chief, Rosebery, out of a difficulty; through Ponsonby he had already received a reproof from the Queen on account of his illegible writing.<sup>1</sup> With the latter's successor, Bigge, the Prime Minister made the following arrangement: 'What I suggest is this . . . Murray's handwriting is like the Chevalier Bayard—beyond reproach. But I cannot use it in writing

<sup>1</sup> See p. 170.

## PRIVATE SECRETARIES

*to the Queen.*' From then onward, therefore, Rosebery dictated to his Private Secretary all his letters, even the most confidential; they were all addressed to Bigge, and those which Rosebery himself signed were treated as confidential letters to Her Majesty, those which Murray signed as communications to the Queen's Secretary. Thus all requirements were met, including those of etiquette. Sir George Murray was subsequently Permanent Secretary to the Treasury and 'was to act as watchdog on the departments, the Navy and the Army, which were justly regarded as the standing and most formidable enemies of public economy.' When the War Office removed from Pall Mall to Whitehall, it sent in a requisition for £600 for the construction of a secret subterranean passage in which, in case of an invasion, all papers could be hidden. The document came before the then Chancellor of the Exchequer, Asquith, initialled by Murray: 'This application must be refused. The last objective of any intelligent invader of this country would be the War Office.'

A really efficient Private Secretary can become the more indispensable to his chief if the Minister happens to be a new man and is not over well informed as to the secrets of his department. Just as that Minister has begun to know his way about properly, to become independent of his staff, he must perhaps make way for another Minister, who in his turn has perhaps to begin at the beginning. If the Private Secretary is a man of experience, he can make himself especially useful to his employer by reason of his intimate knowledge, not mainly of the main staircases of the great houses, but also of the back-stairs, which are sometimes much easier to climb and lead more quickly to the goal. A good secretary can remove many stones from the path, and a personal talk between two Ministerial Secretaries often has a much more lasting result than the official negotiations between the two chiefs. Many important Government matters have in this manner been settled behind the Throne.

## BEHIND THE THRONE

Unless he is an independent politician, the Private Secretary will, when his Minister leaves the political stage, return to his department richer in knowledge and experience, and, when his party has again assumed the helm of State, he will take up his former secretarial post with his former chief or his successor. Evelyn Ashley, before his great times with Gladstone, was Palmerston's Private Secretary, and the author of the latter's biography, in which he wrote of his first employer, 'He had won a character in Europe for being resolute, and was regarded as the embodiment of English pugnacity.' The branches of Ashley's pedigree on various sides, as well as its development downwards, show interesting connections between many persons who form the subject of this book; in the appendix a short sketch, 'The Private Secretaries' Pedigree,' is given which may prove of interest apart from the persons described here.

Shortly after Gladstone's death, Ashley threw interesting sidelights on the distrust and the misunderstandings which governed and darkened the relations and the whole intercourse between the two Liberal statesmen whom he served. 'When I was Private Secretary to Lord Palmerston,' wrote Ashley in the *National Review*, 'and Mr. Gladstone was his Chancellor of the Exchequer, it was a constant source of sorrow to me, and a perpetual cause of mystery, to note how they misunderstood one another, and how evidently each mistrusted the other, though perfectly cordial and most friendly in their mutual intercourse. . . . If the proposal was adhered to, Mr. Gladstone gave way. This seemed to Lord Palmerston a case of gratuitous difficulties put in his way, and attempts to thwart without the courage to resist.' At that time Palmerston was actually playing with the idea of pushing Gladstone – three years before his first Ministry and thirty years before the end of his last – into the House of Lords. It is interesting to bear in mind that Palmerston raised the same objection against Gladstone as Queen Victoria. 'Gladstone was unable,' Ashley explained, 'to

## PRIVATE SECRETARIES

grasp the doctrine which Lord Palmerston used often to expound to me, that a man may be either a Minister or an agitator – but that he cannot . . . be both at the same time.’ The Queen expressed her objection in the shorter and sharper words, ‘He speaks to me as if I were a public meeting.’ . . . Once only, ‘for the first and last time in my life,’ Ashley lost patience and he ‘allowed a cry of impatience to escape . . . in Mr. Gladstone’s presence.’ This was when he brought to his chief the news of the death of the Zulu King Cetewayo, and Gladstone answered, ‘Poor old man, I am very sorry for him.’ ‘Well, Mr. Gladstone,’ replied Ashley, ‘you are the only man in England who is sorry,’ and he left the room. Very curious, too, as Ashley likewise reports, was the composition of the list which Gladstone submitted to him when asking his assistance in the choice of a Private Secretary; ‘there were excellent names, no doubt, but Mr. Gladstone was inclined only to such as were borne by men noted for academical honours, or for devotion to literature and science – regardless of other qualities which, though inferior in themselves, are often of much more value in such a position, so far as the interests and comfort of the chief are concerned.’

Neither under Palmerston nor under Gladstone was it possible for a Private Secretary to stand out and play a separate part. Gladstone worked hard to be not only the conductor of his orchestra and its manager in one and the same person, but when necessary he was also his own impresario. It is ‘very significant’ in this respect that Morley’s biography of Gladstone hardly mentions the Private Secretaries, nor is there any need to mention them, because they never came into the foreground. Ashley is referred to by Morley almost only on account of his biography of Palmerston, or his writings about Gladstone. Thus, when the telegram arrived announcing General Grey as the representative of the Queen, he was watching his chief felling trees, ‘standing by him holding his coat on my arm’ – that is,

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rendering a service which can hardly be looked upon as either very exalted or as collaboration in the 'all-important office of Private Secretary,' as Gladstone himself described it. Gladstone, however, appreciated and valued the achievements of his Secretaries and their great assistance in his work; Algernon West calls him 'an appreciative' but 'not a considerate' master.

E. W. Hamilton also was a strong support for Gladstone, especially in the collection of statistics and the drafting of the Budgets; his real home was the Treasury, and, after his chief had left the political stage, Salisbury's Administration gladly took over the eminent financial expert. As is the lot of every Secretary to the Treasury, Hamilton also gradually was compelled to grow into a 'terror of departments,' and came into conflict with the King's Treasury when he raised the question as to whether the expense of the official visits to England of a crowned head was to be borne by the State or by the Privy Purse. Lord Knollys replied very cleverly and referred to a former arrangement, and in the King's name emphasised 'that an agreement is an agreement, and I know the King will regard it as being very unfair that there should be an attempt to disturb it. . . .' And so matters did not go beyond a correspondence not uninteresting in its details. In the Treasury, Hamilton for years exercised the greatest influence on the financial affairs of this country, and in particular took an outstanding part in the great Consols Conversion, carried out by Goschen. When H. H. Asquith became Chancellor of the Exchequer, Hamilton was still at his post, and through him received the G.C.B. Hamilton enjoyed Gladstone's especial confidence, which was difficult to win, and he belonged to his innermost circle. When Gladstone stood at the height of his popularity, Hamilton was the head of his Secretariat, which at that time had to contend with thirty thousand letters a year. One of his colleagues for a short time was George Leveson Gower, and there was a noble contest between the two as to



ALGERNON WEST

*Vanity Fair*





who was to be spared the task of giving to the chief the news which had just arrived – that the relations between Parnell and Mrs. O'Shea had become public and formed a political scandal. Not until Hamilton had decidedly refused did Leveson Gower, as the more courageous, undertake to inform the master of the sensational event, which caused him the greatest excitement. When Hamilton resigned his Private Secretaryship, Gladstone informed him of his appointment as Secretary to the Treasury, and wrote, ' . . . and this is really the only favour I have ever done you or any of your colleagues to whom I am similarly obliged. . . . As to your services to me, they have been simply indescribable. No one, I think, could dream, until by experience he knew, to what an extent, in these close personal relations, devolution can be carried, and how it strengthens the feeble knees, and also sustains the fainting heart.' Towards the end of a life full of activities Hamilton was afflicted by a regrettable illness, greatly suffering, paralysed, and mentally decrepit.

Gladstone's last Private Secretary was Sir Algernon West, of whom the Queen on one occasion remarked with sharp irony that he 'seems to be Mr. Gladstone's *alter ego*.' (Sir Algernon, who can hardly have known of this allusion, had himself said of Knollys that he was the *alter ego* of his master, Albert Edward.) West's family had had early and intimate relations with Downing Street, for his mother-in-law, Lady Barrington, a daughter of the Prime Minister Earl Grey, governess to the Royal children, had been born at No. 10. West's varied recollections from his ample and long life are a veritable treasure-house of fascinating details, a collection of intimate associations and full of interesting anecdotes and stories, partly serious, even creepy, partly amusing. Just one of each kind: Lord George Cavendish and his brother were known for their taciturnity. On a journey they stopped for the night at an inn, and were shown into a bedroom with three beds, one of which was hidden behind curtains. Both brothers in turn looked into this bed and chose another. The

## BEHIND THE THRONE

next morning they continued their journey, and it was not till late in the afternoon that they began to talk. 'Did you see what was in that bed last night?' 'Yes, brother.' And again they were silent. The bed had contained a corpse. The other: When Edward VII had much enjoyed a performance of one of Oscar Wilde's plays, he asked the Marquis de Soveral the next day whether he had seen *The Importance of Being Earnest*. 'No, sir,' readily replied the diplomat, 'but I have seen the importance of being Ernest Cassel.' – One of West's publications, *Political England*, is a chronicle of the nineteenth century 'told in a letter to Margot Tennant,' and was not published till after his death. The addressee, the subsequent Lady Oxford and Asquith, in her autobiography speaks of her old friend 'Algy' as a man who always felt old and always wanted to die. And so he did in fact attain the age of ninety. West was looked upon as 'the most profound and absolute Gladstonian outside the family circle'; he was on good terms with his chief, and several times accompanied him to Biarritz. Thanks to Gladstone, West received from his Sovereign the most varied honours in recognition of his long and self-sacrificing labours. Very amusing is his description of his visit to Windsor for the investiture with the K.C.B., when Sir Henry Ponsonby introduced him to the mysteries of the ceremonies and went through a rehearsal with him. Together with his chief's son Herbert, West was sworn into the Privy Council on the occasion of Gladstone's last resignation.

West's various pleasant and interesting memoirs give rise to a very general observation. The Private Secretary is almost always inclined to over-estimate his share in events, and most of the memoirs written by them prove this. The Secretary who is negotiating on the instructions of his chief will describe an interview with the other party to the negotiations, if the latter occupies an official – that is, independent – position, in quite a different manner from the other. The Secretary ascribes to himself a part, an influence on the event, which his partner, in describing the same occurrence,

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does not acknowledge at all, or at any rate not to the same extent. The Secretary, merely acting on instructions, automatically places his personality, his activity, too much in the foreground; the other side sees in the representative solely the absent principal. Hence one and the same event is described in the most varied manner; the picture drawn by the Secretary gives the impression of being out of drawing because it is taken from a wrong perspective. The same rule applies, although on a reduced scale, to the Private Secretaries of Ministers as to the Private Secretaries of the Sovereign – however strong their influence may have been in the matter, yet it is lost in the work of him who is looked upon by history as responsible. Only in the very rarest cases will history stop to notice the forces which have been at work behind the scenes, however much they may have contributed to success. . . .

With none of his many Secretaries were Gladstone's relations unreservedly intimate; it was a peculiarity of his character that he did not know how to attach strong men to himself permanently. But perhaps he did not wish to, and did not want to repose too great a confidence in them, although theoretically he took the point of view that a Minister should have no secrets from his Secretaries. Even Hamilton served his chief only so long as the latter was in office, and the next day had to 'encounter' his 'own correspondence single-handed.' Disraeli, on the other hand, knew how to attract devoted and, above all, lasting collaborators.

In one case, it is true, he had very bad luck; neither was the manner in which Disraeli at the start took him into his service, and entered into relations with him, worthy of the Statesman, nor was the manner in which his Secretary betrayed him deserved. Perhaps, however, Fate had effected a compromise of guilt and atonement. Ralph Earle<sup>1</sup> was

<sup>1</sup> Ralph Earle was born in 1836; 1857 he entered into relations with Disraeli in Paris, and in the following year became the Statesman's Private Secretary; in 1865, Earle disappeared from political life.

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altogether one of the most enigmatic personalities amongst Private Secretaries. As a young man he was at the British Embassy under Lord Cowley, and there Disraeli met him. Earle knew how to impress by his adroitness and his knowledge; he was ambitious, intended to get on, and agreed to supply Disraeli, at that time the Leader of the Opposition, with secret information to which officially he had access. (As even Buckle remarks, as to this, that Disraeli 'showed some lack of scruple and of delicacy in availing himself of such help,' the fact may be accepted without comment.) The intimate relations became so strong that Disraeli appointed Earle his Private Secretary. In the new office he made himself useful to his chief in every possible way, brought about a good understanding with the Press, went to Paris with discreet messages to Napoleon III, sent out feelers in Rome to the Papal Throne, and, although not more than twenty-three years of age, 'but a man in matured thought and power of observation,' seemed to be so indispensable that his chief thought that 'without his assistance I could not get thro' my work. I can trust him with interviews. He can see men and manage them.' Later on Earle stood for Parliament, and, when his connection with Disraeli had lasted nearly ten years, he refused to accept anything but an official post, and his chief found a place for him on the Poor Law Board. Then followed a painful break. Earle had made a mistake, an unfortunate exchange of offices; he had received a higher official position, but he no longer sat at the fountain-head of information, and it was whispered that he had made use in Throgmorton Street of what he had heard at Downing Street. And when Earle tried still to hang about in order to obtain an insight into documents, his successor received as his first instructions the order to forbid Earle any further access to the office. Earle took a mean revenge: in the House he attacked a motion of Disraeli and Disraeli himself; 'a more painful exhibition never was witnessed,' said Sir William Fraser, the Parliamentarian and author. Disraeli

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had learnt a bitter lesson; he was far less horrified at Earle's ingratitude than 'ashamed' of his own 'want of discrimination.' After this incident, Earle disappeared entirely from Parliamentary life.

His successor, whose first task it had been to forbid Earle the entry to Disraeli's office, was Montagu Corry, the classic Private Secretary.

Montagu Corry, whose colleague for a time was Charles (subsequently Sir Charles) Fremantle, had under him two assistant Private Secretaries, who came from the Treasury, one of them James Daly, subsequently Lord Dunsandle, who however was hardly known to the public. It was through his mistake, so the story goes, that Lord Hamilton got his peerage. Disraeli told Daly to write to Hamilton, at the time Permanent Under-Secretary, and offer him a baronetcy; the Secretary wrote barony, and Hamilton, no less surprised than delighted, accepted it. The other assistant was Algernon Turnor, a man of wide knowledge who was always ready to assist and to help out when necessity arose. When, on one occasion, he had worked with Disraeli very long and very hard, his chief dismissed him with a good-tempered jovial 'blessing and a hope I should never see him, or any other Secretary, again,' a wish which was not fulfilled! He saw Turnor many more times, as well as other Secretaries. Turnor accompanied him to the Berlin Congress, where it was his task to deal with anything coming from London. Disraeli had one day called him his 'hunting Secretary,' because he liked to follow hounds and owned seven hunters. 'Private Secretaries are different from what they were in my days, when I was Lord Lyndhurst's, and hunted in the Vale of Aylesbury on one horse at the hazard of my life!' wrote Disraeli to Lady Bradford about Turnor and Secretaries in general.

Elsewhere, too, Disraeli expressed in detail his views about Private Secretaries. In *Endymion*, his last book, in which poetic expression is given to so much of his experience

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as a statesman, he wrote: 'The relations between a Minister and his Secretary are, or at least should be, among the finest that can subsist between two individuals. Except the married state, there is none in which so great a confidence is involved, in which more forbearance ought to be exercised, or more sympathy ought to exist. There is usually in the relations an identity of interest, and that of the highest kind; and the perpetual difficulties, the alternations of triumph and defeat, develop devotion. A youthful Secretary will naturally feel some degree of enthusiasm for his chief, and a wise Minister will never stint his regard for one in whose intelligence and honour he finds he can place confidence.'

In the long line of Prime Ministers their Private Secretaries have played very diverse parts, according to the Minister's own outlook. Melbourne allowed to George Anson, who as the subsequent personal adviser of the Prince Consort is the subject of a separate chapter in this book, a certain amount of independence, in spite of his youth, and the same applies to Earl Fortescue,<sup>1</sup> who, as Viscount Ebrington, was his Private Secretary. Under Peel, the Prime Minister who most of all held strongly in his own hand all the threads which run from Downing Street to the various Ministries, and who watched the working of every cog in the Government machine most closely, the Private Secretaries had had no great sphere of influence. Other Prime Ministers, on the other hand, who were satisfied if the decisions of the various departments kept within the main lines laid down by them, gave more play to their trusted collaborators. Salisbury only managed to work up an interest for details when they affected his own office and that of the Foreign Secretary, which he had previously held and which at times he combined with that of Prime Minister. Some critics even maintained that when periodical meetings of the Cabinet had after all to be held, the architectural features of the Foreign Office building which faced his

<sup>1</sup> Fortescue's son, Sir Seymour, was one of the Equerries of Edward VII.

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armchair interested the chief more than the items on the agenda. His Secretaries mainly came from the Foreign Office. 'The most trusted and confidential, as he was the earliest of his friends in the department,' was Sir Philip Currie, first his Private, then Permanent Secretary. Sir Philip was the head of Salisbury's large staff, and accompanied him to the Conference of Constantinople, the prelude to the Berlin Congress; he was a diplomat of the first rank, for many years the real inspirer of Anglo-Turkish policy, and towards the end of his career he represented his country as Ambassador to the *Sublime Porte*. His influence there was so strong and so lasting that, more than five and twenty years after his leaving the Golden Horn, Mukhtar Pasha wrote, six years after the termination of the Great War, that it would perhaps have been possible to avoid not only that, but also the Balkan Wars, if England had supported Turkey more strongly. 'Il est certes regrettable que l'Ambassade Britannique à Constantinople ait été loin à cette époque d'être dirigée par des hommes de l'envergure de Sir Philip Currie, par exemple.' ('It is assuredly to be regretted that the British Embassy at Constantinople should at that period have been far from being led by men of the stature of, for instance, Sir Philip Currie.') Salisbury's policy of a *rapprochement* with Germany was appreciably strengthened by Currie when he met Count Herbert Bismarck in Marienbad and received an invitation to visit the Prince in Friedrichsruhe. Currie, who called on the Reichskanzler 'as the avowed though unofficial emissary of the Foreign Secretary,' and who stayed with him for three days, drew up a memorandum about these conversations which in the main reproduces Bismarck's ideas. It is interesting to observe that the question of Belgian neutrality was also discussed in detail. To Bismarck's question, 'Would England fight if Belgium was attacked?' Sir Philip replied, 'No doubt, if she had an ally.' On being questioned again, Currie repeated 'that ever since he had been at the Foreign Office, Belgium and



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Constantinople had been looked upon as questions about which England would fight.' Sir Eric Barrington also, who for a time was Salisbury's Private Secretary, was a specialist in foreign affairs. Subsequently he was with Lord Lansdowne, and in that position he was able to exercise a far-reaching influence in a great and important matter. Whilst Lansdowne was not definitely opposed to the intention of Edward VII to visit Paris two years after his accession, yet he was somewhat doubtful about it; only Barrington's full grasp of the importance of that diplomatic journey, his enthusiasm for the idea, induced Lansdowne to give his full approval and support. Before Barrington, Arthur Balfour was Salisbury's Private Secretary; and, being his chief's nephew, their relations were particularly intimate; as Balfour had an insight into everything, and all interrelations came to his knowledge, he went through a quite specially good training which prepared him for his office of Prime Minister. When Balfour was himself in Downing Street, his Secretary, J. S. Sandars, was allowed an extraordinary amount of independence, which at times was so great that some critics thought it really went beyond the responsibility admitted by the Constitution. To every question put to him he at once gave the Prime Minister's answer, even without having asked him, and it was said that in his energy he was 'apt to forget two things: first, that there was a House of Lords; and second, that there was a King.' The considerably altered relations between Prime Minister and adviser find a parallel at most in the case of the younger Pitt and Lord Melville (Henry Dundas), but, after all, the latter was a colleague in the Cabinet, whilst Sandars was merely Secretary. When, previously to the reconstruction of his Cabinet, there was a talk that Balfour might be forced to resign, it was looked upon as a consolation that in any case the Private Secretary could remain in office! Assuredly it was Sandars who had the greatest share in the reconstruction of the Cabinet which enabled Balfour to remain in office. He not only negotiated

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direct with Knollys, but also represented the Prime Minister's views in interviews with the King. When, on one occasion, he asked the Sovereign's consent to communicate the contents of the Speech from the Throne to the Press on the day before, as had up to then been the practice, the King refused permission. 'If the Press gets hold of it before it is made,' decided the King, '. . . it becomes a mere farce. Sandars belongs evidently to a new régime. One has heard of the "New Woman," but he is the "New Man."' In spite of this good-humoured rebuke, and in spite of the many criticisms brought against Sandars's activities, it was he who raised the office of Private Secretary to a specially high level. All the same, he also did not succeed in equalling the 'classic Private Secretary.'

## CHRONOLOGICAL TABLES

CHARLES GEORGE BARRINGTON, C.B.,

1827-1911

Son of George Barrington and Caroline, daughter of the Prime Minister Earl Grey, governess to the Royal children. C. G. Barrington's sister was married to Sir Algernon West.<sup>1</sup>

1828 Treasury.

1856-66 Private Secretary to Lord Palmerston.

1866 Private Secretary to Lord Russell.  
Subsequently Auditor of the Civil List.  
Assistant Secretary to Treasury.

Charles George Barrington's cousin was Sir B. Eric Barrington (q.v.).<sup>1</sup>

RIGHT HON.

SIR CHARLES ALGERNON WEST, P.C., G.C.B.,

1832-1921

Clerk to the Admiralty.

Private Secretary to Sir C. Wood and Duke of Somerset.

Private Secretary to Gladstone during his various periods of office as Prime Minister.

Chairman of Board of Inland Revenue.

Director of Northern Assurance.

Member of the Council of Foreign Bondholders.

Sir Algernon married in 1858 a daughter of Captain the Hon. George Barrington, a grand-daughter of the Prime Minister Earl Grey. (See 'The Private Secretaries' Pedigree.')

<sup>1</sup> See 'The Private Secretaries' Pedigree.'

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He published:

*Recollections, 1832-86* (1899).

*Memoir of Sir Henry Keppel, Admiral of the Fleet* (1905).

*One City and Many Men* (1908).

*Contemporary Portraits* (1920).

After his death appeared:

*Political England: A Chronicle of the Nineteenth Century, told in a letter to Miss Margot Tennant* (1922).

*Private Diaries* (1922).

### RIGHT HON.

ANTHONY EVELYN MELBOURNE ASHLEY, P.C.,

1836-1907

Fourth son of the 7th Earl of Shaftesbury, the philanthropist, and Lady Emily Cowper, whose mother, Melbourne's sister, married, after Cowper's death, Lord Palmerston. Ashley was married to Charlotte, daughter of Sir W. R. Farquhar, whose sister was married to General Grey, Private Secretary to Queen Victoria. Evelyn Ashley's son, Wilfrid Lord Mount Temple, son-in-law to Sir Ernest Cassel, is the father of Lady (Edwina) Louis Mountbatten. Further, a sister of Evelyn Ashley's father, Harriet Anne, married H. J. Lowry-Corry; their son, Montagu Corry, Lord Rowton, was the 'classical' Private Secretary to Disraeli. (See 'The Private Secretaries' Pedigree.')

1858-65 Private Secretary to Lord Palmerston.

1865-72 Bar (Oxford Circuit).

1874-85 M.P.

1880-82 Parliamentary Secretary to Board of Trade.

1880-85 Church Estates Commissioner.  
Private Secretary to Gladstone.

1882-85 Under-Secretary of State for Colonies.

1898-1902 Mayor of Romsey (near Broadlands).

## BEHIND THE THRONE

ALGERNON TURNOR, M.A., C.B.,  
1845-1921

- 1867 Treasury.
- 1874 Private Secretary to Disraeli.
- 1878 Attached to the mission at Berlin Congress.
- 1880 Financial Secretary Post Office.
- 1896 Resigned.

SIR EDWARD WALTER HAMILTON, G.C.B.,  
1847-1908

- Son of Bishop of Salisbury.
- 1870 Entered Treasury.
- 1872-73 Private Secretary to Robert Lowe, Chancellor of the Exchequer.
- 1873-74 } Private Secretary to Gladstone.
- 1880-85 }
- Back to Treasury.
- 1902 Permanent Financial Secretary to Treasury, together with Sir George Murray (q.v.), formerly Private Secretary to Lord Rosebery.

Hamilton published various writings on financial matters, a number of musical compositions, and a monograph on Gladstone.

SIR PHILIP HENRY WODEHOUSE CURRIE, 1ST LORD,  
P.C., G.C.B.,  
1834-1906

- 1854 Clerk Foreign Office.
- 1856 Legation St. Petersburg.
- 1857-58 Précis Writer to Earl Clarendon, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.
- 1863 Secretary in Diplomatic Service.
- 1868 Assistant Clerk.
- 1874 Senior Clerk.

## PRIVATE SECRETARIES

- 1876 With Lord Salisbury at Constantinople Conference.
- 1878-80 Private Secretary to Lord Salisbury.
- 1878 With Lord Salisbury at Berlin Congress.  
C.B.
- 1884 Assistant Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.
- 1885 Visit to Prince Bismarck in Friedrichsruhe.  
K.C.B.
- 1889-93 Permanent Under-Secretary of State for Foreign  
Affairs.
- 1893-98 Ambassador at Constantinople.
- 1898-1902 Ambassador at Rome.

Lord Currie was married to Miss Mary Montgomery ('Violet Fane').

### HON. SIR BERNARD ERIC BARRINGTON, K.C.B.,

1847-1918

Youngest son of 6th Viscount Barrington. (See 'The  
Private Secretaries' Pedigree')

- 1867 Entered Foreign Office.
- 1874-80 Précis Writer in Foreign Office.
- 1878 Berlin Congress.
- 1885-86 Private Secretary to Earl of Iddesleigh.
- 1895-1900 Private Secretary to Lord Salisbury.
- 1900-05 Private Secretary to Lord Lansdowne.
- 1906 Assistant Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.

### RIGHT HON. SIR GEORGE HERBERT MURRAY, P.C., G.C.B., K.C.V.O.,

- 1849 Born.
- 1873 Entered Foreign Office.
- 1880 Transferred to Treasury.  
Private Secretary to Gladstone.  
Private Secretary to Lord Rosebery.
- 1897-99 Chairman of Board of Inland Revenue.

## BEHIND THE THRONE

1899-1902 Secretary to Post Office.

1903-11 Permanent Secretary to Treasury.

Director of Westminster Bank.

A son of Sir George, Sir George Evelyn Pemberton Murray, has been Secretary to the Post Office from 1914 until 1934; he now is Chairman of the Board of Customs and Excise.

RIGHT HON. JOHN S. SANDARS, P.C., C.V.O.

1853-1934

1877-86 Bar (Lincoln's Inn).

then Private Secretary to Secretary of State for the Home Department.

M.P.

1892-1905 Private Secretary to Arthur Balfour.

He spent the last thirty years of his life in retirement.

Published:

*The Roman Doctrine of Culpa* and, a supreme authority on all racing matters, *Chapters of Turf History* under the name of 'Newmarket.'

## MONTY CORRY

AT Raby Castle, the seat of Harry Vane, recently created Duke of Cleveland, a large house-party was assembled. One evening, after dinner, the guests were scattered in the various reception-rooms, playing whist, talking, reading, writing letters; only the few members of the younger generation, who did not quite know what to do with themselves, were bored. In order to dispel the monotony, they teased one of their number, whose drawing-room talents were known to all, until at last he consented to sit down at the piano and entertain them with a selection from his extensive repertoire of music-hall songs. Just as he was at the top of his form, dancing and singing at the same time, the door opened softly and a lean gentleman entered, looking through his monocle, half amused, half admiring, at the performance. When the artist saw this spectator – the very last whom he would have expected among his audience – he broke off in the greatest embarrassment. He was particularly anxious to be taken seriously by this man; the day before, when he had been presented to the great visitor, the latter, an old acquaintance of his father, had spoken gracious and encouraging words to him of which he might well be proud, and now he was afraid of having made himself ridiculous, having played the fool. The spectator, however, had liked the song; he addressed a few flattering words to the performer, and took leave with a pleasant, ‘Perhaps I shall ask you to be some day my impresario.’ No one attached the slightest importance to this negligible event, this casual after-dinner conversation. But when, a year later, the gentleman with the single eyeglass was engaged in forming Lord Derby’s third Ministry, the young man remembered the meeting and addressed to his acquaintance of those days the following



words : 'It is with much hesitation that I write to you, and only your kindness to me when I met you at Raby last autumn induces me to do so. I have for three years been practising as a barrister, and am now most anxious to get a start in political life; and, though I can scarcely presume to ask for the honour of being Private Secretary to yourself, yet I do venture to hope that, should you know of some member of the Government to whom my services might be acceptable, you would be willing to mention me as one most desirous to serve in that capacity, and give all my time and energies to the Conservative cause.' By return he received a reply asking him to call at Downing Street. There he was graciously received, not recommended to another member of the Government but at once retained.

And that is how Montagu Corry came to Disraeli.

This was a man who did not like to walk in well-trodden paths; he was ever original, and intended to be original. It is difficult to imagine that any other of the great Prime Ministers, with the possible exception of Melbourne, would in this manner have engaged a Private Secretary of whom in reality he knew nothing at all, whom he had hardly seen, of whom he had heard nothing but the singing of a comic music-hall song, and whose father had on one occasion crossed his path in a hostile way. The Right Hon. Henry J. Lowry-Corry, a Peelite, of whom the Prince Consort had said that his 'opinions on Free Trade were by no means decided,' had one day, as spokesman of his group, told Lord Derby that he and his friends 'would not serve under the leadership of Mr. Disraeli.' In spite of this refusal, he subsequently accepted from the hand of Disraeli, who had recommended him to the Queen 'as one not unworthy' of her consideration, a post in the Cabinet; he was looked upon as 'a first-rate administrator,' was 'popular in the House' of which at that time he had been a member for forty years; and as, in addition, he was 'beloved by the Service to which he once belonged, and he could speak,' Corry Senior again



*Vanity Fair*

‘POWER AND PLACE’  
DISRAELI AND MONTAGU CORRY



became for a time, under Disraeli, First Lord of the Admiralty, a post which he had already held in Lord Derby's Government. Monty's mother, Lady Harriet Ashley, was a daughter of the 6th Earl of Shaftesbury, which made Corry, Disraeli's Private Secretary, a cousin of Evelyn Ashley, who served Gladstone in the same capacity. (In the case of most Private Secretaries, the good connections were mainly a maternal inheritance, the political views a paternal one.) From the first moment of their common activity there arose between Disraeli and Corry, master and assistant, a relationship of such mutual confidence that it developed into a lifelong connection. Disraeli, always and on every occasion an artist, knew how to train, to instruct the young man in a truly artistic manner, without ever commanding. The beginner's errors were reprov'd by a tactful plural: 'We must not make another mistake'; the opening of letters marked 'Private' was not allowed, solely because 'the correspondents may dislike it.' His objections to an insufficient statement of titles on the address of communications sent by him to subordinate authorities may be looked upon as *avis au lecteur*: Corry is asked to give to the writer in question 'at the earliest opportunity a gentle educational hint,' for 'the manners of D[owning] S[treet] are getting quite American. The tradition of the old etiquette must be gradually revived.' Every day brought new instructions from Hughenden to London, but hardly any came without a kindly word: 'You do your business very well, and I am always glad to hear from you,' and an encouraging 'You also have not found the secretariat quite as much of a sinecure as we expected; but you have done your work very well. . . .' Disraeli was, like Gladstone, an 'appreciative' but in addition also a 'considerate,' master. Thus, and perhaps thus only, could it be possible for a sensitive man like Corry so to grow into the skin of his office, so to adapt himself to his chief, that in the end he completely identified himself with him. The two were constantly seen together,

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Disraeli leaning slightly on his Secretary's arm; also at night, after long sittings of the House, strolling slowly home so as to get a breath of fresh air. The relation of employer and employed had given place to a strong friendship, reinforced by the unselfish devotion of the younger man. Corry thus became, in the best sense of the word, the lieutenant of his chief. 'I like him very much, better than any other man'; 'Monty is of use to me, being resolute as well as sharp'; 'He has fine talents, a sweet temper, wonderful energy, and a noble disposition' – these are some of the opinions which Disraeli expressed about his assistant in letters to the Queen, to Lady Bradford; and the praise bestowed was naturally at the same time a recommendation which was bound to bear fruit. The parts suggested by Disraeli's kindly words at the first meeting at Raby Castle had been completely reversed; it was not Corry who became Disraeli's impresario, but, quite the contrary, it was Disraeli who planned to make Corry what he became; he purposefully managed him, so that he was more than a helper, but was accepted everywhere as his representative. When the Prime Minister was a guest at Osborne, Corry came down with documents and to have papers signed by his chief; when the Queen heard of the presence of the renowned Secretary, he was at once invited to dine with the Household, to stay the night at the Castle, and the chief could write home, 'M. Corry a lucky fellow.' Not very much later Corry was fully acknowledged, an equal guest who came to Court with his master, and Disraeli wrote, not without pride, to Lady Bradford, 'Fancy Monty a recognised courtier! The first Private Secretary whose existence has been acknowledged by Royal lips.' Soon the Prime Minister could report to his amiable correspondent a still greater success of his Private Secretary in 'a struggle between Parliamentary privilege and semi-Royal prerogative': Disraeli had been invited for the same evening by Albert Edward to a big reception and by the Speaker to an official dinner; this latter he refused, 'as the

phrase is, for the P. of W., alleging *command*,' but this did not avail him, as the Speaker 'would not take my excuse, alleging, that there was no "command" except from the Sovereign.' Disraeli then sent Monty to Marlborough House, where he discussed the matter, first with Knollys, then with the Prince himself, who, though he 'wanted the Prime Minister' for his dinner, at last reluctantly released him. In the afternoon a letter came from the Prince 'saying . . . I cd. be represented at the dinner by no one better than my faithful secy. Monty is quite in his stirrups, and has no doubt that all the Prince's banditti, at the Marlboro' Club, will be very jeal[ous].' It was now no longer necessary for Corry to send his communications and reports to the Queen, when representing his too occupied or indisposed chief, to his colleague at Court, for the latter to submit them to the Queen; he could address them direct to the Sovereign. When, during an important meeting of the Cabinet, the Prime Minister was taken ill, and therefore was unable to report to the Palace, it was not one of the other Ministers present who was commanded to an audience, but Corry, and the Queen was 'more graciously and condescendingly charming' to him 'than words can express.' Beyond the report he had to make she had talked to him about all possible matters, as if Monty 'had been her favourite Prime Minister' himself. . . .

Lady Beaconsfield had considered it her task in life to remove from her husband's path all the cares of the daily round, all excitements, all obstacles. Hence she valued Corry and trusted him, because in him she saw her helper and – one day – her successor in her endeavours. When she was dying, she expressed the wish to see Corry. Disraeli, who for several days had not left the sick-room, wrote to him: 'She says she must see you . . . she will not let me go to fetch you. Come. D.' She died the same day. Disraeli, who had become estranged from the small and everyday matters, would now have fallen a prey to the double load

## BEHIND THE THRONE

of cares and privation resting on him if it had not been for Monty. For the man who had risen so high, had no friends in the sense that other statesmen had them, who from the first days of their lives had been 'born to it,' who in their family and their traditional surroundings had a natural support in every occurrence in life. Disraeli, not born to a great career, had to make his own name and position in the face of the most powerful obstacles, and without any connections, and had to surmount constantly arising fresh prejudices. So it happened that he had many friends, but no friend. In addition, he had now, after the death of his wife, to leave the house in which he had spent the thirty-three years of his married life, store his personal possessions, and put up at a hotel. 'I hope some of my friends will take notice of me now in my great misfortune, for I have no home, and when I tell my coachman to drive home I feel it is a mockery.' Corry, above all others, did everything in his power to relieve his chief's difficult position, to settle everyday matters for him, was 'his factotum, and he needs one, for he is quite unfit for that sort of business.' But, in spite of this, Disraeli again and again groaned, in his letters to Corry, about 'melancholy,' his 'miserable state,' and 'the heaviness and misery' of his sad and altered life.

Corry was one of those tactful persons 'who never make a mistake, never say the wrong thing, never forget who are present nor who their fourth cousins are.' His relations with his chief – the only one he ever had – must be measured on quite a special scale; he felt so bound up with the man who had always reposed every trust in him that, although at that time not a rich man, during Disraeli's retirement he refused every post offered him, and remained with him without any remuneration. Of course, when Disraeli was called to form his second Ministry, which was to become his 'great Ministry,' Corry again occupied his accustomed place in Downing Street, and of course it was Corry who went with his chief to the Berlin Congress. By small stages, so as not to tire

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the delicate Prime Minister too much, they took four days over the journey, and with astounding energy the statesman who now, as Lord Beaconsfield, conducted the destiny of England from the House of Lords, could throw himself into the whirlpool of negotiations; but he was not equal to those exertions for long, and Corry felt compelled to send for his chief's English doctor. Extensive reports were sent by Corry during these sad days direct to the Queen, who had urgently warned Beaconsfield against the journey and had but reluctantly given her consent. As it is the fate of all congresses to last much longer than had been originally anticipated, this also happened in the case of the meeting of the great European statesmen in Berlin. In order to expedite the negotiations, Bismarck frequently threatened to go to Kissingen for his cure; Beaconsfield chose a more drastic means: in order to give special stress to the claims against Russia, he declared that he would sooner break up the Congress than give in, and, to show that he was serious in his threat, he gave Corry instructions to order a special train for the return of the English mission. Corry it was who prevented Beaconsfield from addressing the Congress in his doubtful French; the story has been told as frequently as the one of how Gortschakoff and Beaconsfield mixed up the maps they had brought with them and went into frightful rages, and the earlier one, in which Corry negotiated with Nathaniel Rothschild for an advance for the purchase of the Suez Canal shares. It may be assumed that everybody has long since known each of these anecdotes in one of its many variants, each more piquant and delightful than the other. But we must not omit to voice the suspicion that the excellent Monty, like so many amusing talkers and interesting anecdote-mongers, may gradually have given a different twist to the three tales, in each of which he plays so important a part; may have defined and polished them more and more, till perhaps in the end he did not exactly know himself what had really happened, and how.



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After his triumphant return from Berlin, Beaconsfield was requested by the Queen to come to Osborne, 'and of course bring Mr. Corry.' There 'Lord Beaconsfield in high spirits' described the Congress, told of Bismarck 'and all the various people he had met, and all he had done at Berlin.' And 'Mr. Corry also told us a great deal.' On the following day Beaconsfield asked the Queen 'for some rewards for those who had been with him.' Corry was not on the list submitted; 'he wished for nothing'; but the Queen insisted on his getting a C.B., 'as he had been so useful, and as Lord Salisbury's Secretary Mr. Ph. Currie gets it.'

Disraeli sometimes dared to approach his Sovereign with suggestions which hardly any other man would have had the courage to make; 'gratitude' was to him more than a mere word which frequently occurred in his dictionary – more than a great gesture. Moved by this strong feeling, he twice submitted to the Queen requests the making of which by him, and the granting of them by the August Lady, must be esteemed equally highly. The first occasion arose when, at the end of his first Ministry, he declined a peerage for himself, but asked that his wife might be made a peeress: 'Next to Your Majesty there is one to whom he owes everything, and who has looked forward to this period of their long united lives as one of comparative repose and of recognised honour. Might Mr. Disraeli therefore, after thirty-one years of Parliamentary toil, and after having served Your Majesty on more than one occasion, if not with prolonged success at least with unfaltering devotion, humbly solicit Your Majesty to grant those honours to his wife which perhaps under ordinary circumstances Your Majesty would have deigned to bestow on him?' Thus, in spite of some initial hesitation on the part of the Queen, the formerly 'very gay and ubiquitous' lady, 'a succession of surprises,' whom very many people had at one time deemed themselves entitled to look down on, became Viscountess Beaconsfield. Victoria had decided, according to the advice of her Secretary, General

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Grey, 'to follow the dictates of Your Majesty's kind heart.' And the same gratitude which Disraeli showed to the companion of his life he also showed to the companion of his labour. When, for the second time, he returned the seals of office, never to take them up again, he refused, now that for four years he had been Earl of Beaconsfield, for himself and his family, any further honour which his Sovereign offered with all her heart as 'mark of her gratitude and admiration'; 'personally all that Lord Beaconsfield can desire for himself is that Your Majesty may deign sometimes to remember him.' But in this official letter of resignation he continued: 'There is one point on which he would ask permission yet to trouble Your Majesty. It refers to the position of Mr. Corry,' who had always refused any kind of promotion, who even 'has refused the uncontested representation of his own County of Shropshire, as his duties as an M.P. were not consistent with those to Your Majesty's Prime Minister.' Not only is Mr. Corry 'of noble birth on either side: his parents were both the children of Earls,' but, in addition, 'a great change in the social position . . . has taken place. . . . He has come into the possession of Rowton Castle. . . . His income will exceed ten thousand per annum.'<sup>1</sup> . . . It is impossible that such a man will be content to fall back into the crowd of dismissed Private Secretaries. He will probably become absorbed in that fashionable world where he is a favourite. . . . Is it possible that Your Majesty might make him Baron Rowton of Rowton Castle in the County of Shropshire? . . . Not only Mr. Corry knows nothing of this suggestion, but Lord Beaconsfield does not wish to press it on Your Majesty in any sense. He would not wish it to occur, unless Your Majesty thought it a wise and becoming arrangement.' The Queen gladly consented, and so Corry received 'a unique distinction, which no Private Secretary had received before.'

<sup>1</sup> Corry was the heir of his Aunt Charlotte, the daughter of the 7th Earl of Shaftesbury, the wife of Henry Lister of Rowton Castle.

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Lord Rowton's peerage died out with him; Montagu Corry's activity as Disraeli's Private Secretary has become historical.

From a man like Corry, whom he so thoroughly trusted and esteemed and whom he had so promoted, the *statesman* did not of course have any secrets; the *poet* did. They spoke but little about his literary plans, for Disraeli had made it a rule 'never to breathe a word on such matters to anyone.' Thus it happened that Corry was totally ignorant of the composition of *Lothair*, although the writing of this was spread over two years. Disraeli himself commented on this curious anomaly: 'My Private Secretary, Mr. Montagu Corry, who possesses my entire confidence in political matters, who opens all my letters, and enters my cabinet and deals as he likes with all my papers in my absence, never knew anything about *Lothair* until he read the advertisement in the journals.' Whether Rowton was aware of the conception of *Endymion* is not known; the business negotiations with the publisher, however, he conducted alone. They were concluded at a time when the sitting of the House of Lords had begun. Beaconsfield was in his accustomed place; the seat by his side, usually occupied by Rowton, remained empty. In the middle of the sitting the latter entered, sat down by his chief, changed his mind, and wrote to him from the writing-room: 'There are things too big to impart in whispers! So I leave your side, just to write these words –

'Longman has to-day offered Ten Thousand Pounds for *Endymion*.

'I have accepted it! I cannot tell you what a pleasure it is to me to see my ardent ambition for you gratified.

'And you have an added honour which may for ever remain without precedent.' Six weeks later the publisher, Mr. Longman – who has left a humorous description of the curious scene, which marvellously illustrates Beaconsfield's total ineptitude when faced with small matters – came to Hughenden to take away the manuscript and pay the fee, and the author reported to his friend: 'The receipt was

ready and the cheque drawn, or else I should have thought it this morning all a dream. I know no magic of the Middle Ages equal to it! and you are the Magician, best and dearest of friends.' Shortly before the publication of *Endymion* the author had made some literary confessions to his Royal friend; he said that the book had arisen from the monotony of his lack of occupation; he had sought for 'some relief in literary composition.' His creative urge was 'a weakness, but one which organically it seems I cannot resist.' One of the first copies he would 'pray to be allowed to send it to her, who is the Sovereign not only of my person, but of my heart.' To her thanks for this gift the Queen did not forget to add that 'if Lord Rowton has returned, I should be happy to see him here with you.' The success of *Endymion* fully came up to all the expectations of author and publisher; when Longman reported as to the great sales, Beaconsfield was a very sick man. Rowton subsequently added to this report, 'This was the last business transaction I ever had with my dear chief.'

At the beginning, Rowton was not present at the last sick-bed of Beaconsfield; he was in Algiers with his sister, who was seriously ill. Even when he was in good health, the aged man had felt deeply any absence of his friend, had written that for him it was 'a calamity.' True, he had now asked Lord Barrington 'to take Monty's place,' but had written to Lady Bradford that 'he is not as Monty. He has good talents, great experience of the pol. world, having been priv. secy. to Ld. Derby, and one too on whose honour and devotion I can rely.' But the fatal illness took a more and more serious course. 'Barrington is very kind and sedulous,' complained the patient to the still absent Rowton, 'but I want you.' Now the faithful friend hastened back as fast as he could, but found his old master too weakened and too exhausted to be equal to the excitement of a meeting; the patient himself was afraid of this tax on his feelings. And yet the reunion took place quite naturally 'when Rowton

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quietly entered Beaconsfield's room and read him a Parliamentary debate for which he had asked; and for the last week Rowton took his natural place as the principal watcher . . . by the bed of the dying statesman.' . . .

'Without suffering, quite calmly, as if in sleep,' Rowton reported to Osborne, the great man passed away; on the following day he gave to the 'heart-broken' Queen a personal account of the last hours, brokenly, for 'he was frequently unable to proceed from emotion.' Rowton placed before Victoria the testament, and showed her 'the headings of it. The wording, respecting the papers, is very kind towards me and shows the greatest confidence in Lord Rowton,' says the Queen in her diary. Beaconsfield did not want to have a State funeral in Westminster; in his will he 'desires and directs' to be laid to rest by the side of his wife, and the Sovereign, 'anxious not to interfere in the slightest degree with the wishes of the deceased statesman,' decided that this desire 'should be considered as sacred, and that he should rest at Hughenden, which he was so fond of.' As to his last farewell, Rowton reported to the Queen that 'on Thursday evening he looked on that dear face for the last time; and then all was sealed up. There lies, and will ever lie, close to that faithful heart, the photograph of the Queen *he* loved; that which Your Majesty gave him signed, two years ago, on Your Majesty's birthday.' Everything was to pass without pomp, simply and as quietly as possible, and even the Queen's gracious suggestion that the coffin should be taken through London by day, 'so as to enable some demonstration of public sorrow,' Rowton considered himself compelled to refuse in his own name as well as that of the other executors; his report closed with the words, 'When the sun rises to-morrow, the coffin will rest in the room at Hughenden where hangs the picture of his *dear Queen*.'

Lord Rowton, Sir Philip Rose, and Sir Nathaniel Rothschild, subsequently first Lord Rothschild, had already gone to Hughenden. All day long, till a late hour, a crowd

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gathered outside 19 Curzon Street, the house where the great statesman had died, and did not disperse till eleven o'clock, when the door was closed, all lights were extinguished, and the house left apparently to repose. Just as in Disraeli's life everything had been wrapped in a mysterious darkness, so it happened with his last journey. About midnight, when there was hardly any life in Curzon Street, Mr. Alfred de Rothschild arrived quite unnoticed; an hour later a hearse, drawn by a single horse, drew up. Everything was ready, and, immediately after the coffin had been placed in the hearse, the drive to Paddington Station was commenced quite unobserved; there the coffin was quietly but with celerity transferred to the waiting train, which at early dawn arrived at High Wycombe. Without stop, the journey by carriage was continued to Hughenden, where Lord Rowton and the other executors were waiting to receive the remains. Four days later Rowton received in his late master's country house his Royal mistress, who had come to bid a personal farewell to her favourite Minister, already resting in the still open vault; she 'could hardly realise it all, it seemed too sad, and so cheerless.' In the Manor House the Queen took tea with Rowton in the library, where two and a half years earlier she had sat with her 'kind friend, and where he had given me a long account of a very stormy Cabinet he had had. . . . I seemed to hear his voice, and the impassioned, eager way he described everything.'

Beaconsfield had left to Rowton all his papers, correspondence, and existing documents without reserve for his absolute discretionary 'use, treatment, and publication.' The usually so active man faced this enormous mass of material with an amazing lack of decision, almost completely inactive. The most important thing which he himself did was with the permission of the Queen to make copies of all the letters which Beaconsfield had written to her; she, on her side, had decided that all her letters to the late statesman should during Rowton's life remain in his

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custody.<sup>1</sup> But, in addition to the voluminous correspondence with the Sovereign and the immense mass of material found, there were many cases in the Rothschild safes in New Court which Rowton never thoroughly examined. 'He was never able,' wrote the late Lord Esher in his memoranda, 'to bring himself to grapple with the formidable bequest.' He was often urgently requested to write a biography of Disraeli, and none would have been better suited or more capable for such a task than he; but he could not even be induced to arrive at a definite decision to entrust the matter to anyone else. He entered into discussions with the most varied persons in the most varied circles, but ever postponed a final settlement. One of the first to be thought of was George Wyndham; then Lord Morley was taken into consideration, and from the point of view of the amateur of literary tit-bits it is much to be regretted that the choice did not fall on him; it would be a quite special treat to have a biography of Disraeli from the pen of Gladstone's biographer. When, twenty-two years after the death of the great statesman, Rowton and Rothschild agreed that at least one volume should at last be published, they asked Lord Rosebery to write it; he refused, and observed how strange it was 'to have been asked to write the authoritative lives of both Gladstone and Dizzy.' Not until after the death of Lord Rowton, however, did the matter get a proper start. Lord Rothschild, on whom the sole responsibility now rested, and who was quicker in arriving at decisions than the ever-hesitating Monty, was not displeased that *The Times* should be interested in Beaconsfield's literary remains. It acquired from the trustees all documents, letters, and memoranda, and entrusted one of its editors, William Flavelle Monypenny, with their arrangement and publication. The first volume appeared in 1910; after Monypenny's death, George Earle Buckle, who subsequently edited the *Letters of Queen Victoria*, continued the task, and his last volume appeared

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix.

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forty years after Beaconsfield's death. Morley's biography of Gladstone was finished five years after his death. . . .

After his old master's decease Rowton remained in particularly close and trusted relations with the Queen, who attached great value to his counsel, and often asked his views when he was her guest at Windsor. He reported about political events, and, now out of office, he, through many personal talks, made Salisbury's dealings with the Sovereign easier. Together with many other prominent persons, he was asked by the Queen to exert his influence so that there should 'be no official inquiry into the conduct' of the Boer War, and, if this could not be avoided, at least to have it postponed until the war was over. Salisbury promised Rowton to do everything in his power in order to comply as far as possible with the Sovereign's wish, but 'this will be a formidable difficulty, because no doubt Parliament will press that the inquiry should commence as soon as possible.' Until the Queen's death, Rowton exercised a considerable influence on politics.

Various offers had been made to Corry, by Beaconsfield himself and after his death. His chief on one occasion wanted to appoint him Clerk of the Parliaments, 'the best post . . . in matter of dignity, agreeable duties, and income.' Later he would have liked to make him a Minister, and, according to Barrington's notes, 'he chiefly deplored his fall from power on account of M. Corry, who in his opinion was fitted to fill any *Cabinet Office*. This was said with genuine warmth.' The Queen also would have been pleased to draw him (then still Mr. Corry, and, curiously enough, at a time when his chief was in office) into her *entourage*, and had offered to make him Master of her Household. Half amused, half horrified, Beaconsfield wrote to Lady Bradford: 'I fear I never told you, and I only tell it quite in secret, that the Faery wanted Monty to succeed Biddulph, £2,000 pr. ann. and the head place of the Household! What a strange thing had it happened!' But Monty, though at



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that time by no means a rich man, preferred to remain with his chief. Many years later the question was momentarily considered to send Rowton to an important post abroad. His old chief had thought highly of Monty's diplomatic abilities, and in Salisbury's opinion also he 'was fit for a delicate diplomatic mission.' When Sir E. Malet left Berlin, and the Emperor expressed the wish to see 'a soldier or *grand seigneur*' at his Court as England's representative, it was first thought to suggest Wolseley, then Buller. 'I do not know of any peer,' wrote Salisbury to Bigge during these negotiations, 'who could take the place, except possibly Rowton.' But in the end quite another man became Ambassador at Berlin, a member of Lord Harewood's family, Sir Frank Lascelles.

In Society, where Corry had always been a favourite (and was still more so as the wealthy Lord Rowton, 'the great Monty, the favourite of Courts and Queens,' as his chief had on one occasion called him in gentle mockery and yet proud of the success of his Secretary), he continued to occupy a brilliant and prominent position. Not only was he 'a repository of more State and personal secrets than any man in the kingdom,' but he also could tell a story and entertain, and was full of anecdotes about his old master, of whose remarkable and fairy-tale-like life he knew all the details, partly from Disraeli's accounts, and partly from his own experience. Rowton was the tradition incarnate of his great chief.

But in spite of the fact that he knew so many people, and was highly esteemed by many, yet the latter part of Rowton's life was strangely like that of his chief. He also had many friends, but no friend; many who respected, but none who loved him. Contrary, however, to Disraeli, who owed all his success to women's favour, no friendship with a woman added charm to Monty's life. Visitors to his sick-bed found an uncomfortable home, lacking any warmth, and without the neat hand of an attentive woman.

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He died as he had lived, full of the remembrance of the man in whose shadow he had spent his own strong life. 'His nearest thing to a creed was his worship for his old master.'

Montagu Corry, the most faithful among the many faithful, the politician and adviser, the selfless friend, was dead. But Lord Rowton, the practical philanthropist, on whom something of the spirit of his uncle Ashley, 7th Earl of Shaftesbury, had descended, survives to-day; perhaps he does not live very markedly in the memory of the many whom he helped and still helps to-day – for if in our times we live more rapidly, we also forget more quickly – but he does live in his work.

About the year 1889, Rowton was asked by Lord Iveagh to become a trustee of the Guinness Trust Fund of £250,000 for the provision of artisan dwellings. He accepted the call, for, of the many social problems occupying the public mind, this was the one in which he was specially interested, and to which he had given practical assistance; thus it is due to his influence and his initiative, united with that of the then Prince of Wales, Edward VII, that considerable improvements were made in the sleeping accommodation of the Army. His activity as a trustee, however, led him to quite another trend of thought which lay outside the scope of the Trust Fund. He had in mind 'the poor man's hotel,' an institution in which a man could not merely sleep and have a meal, but could also stay, read, talk, smoke – in short, live. Reading- and smoking-rooms, and a library, were to be at the disposal of the inmates, and of course also baths. And with decent lodging accommodation was to be united the supply of good food at the lowest possible rate. The man who sought shelter in such a hotel was to be able to enter it without the feeling of moral degradation that almost inevitably results from resorting to a common lodging-house, and he was to be able to leave it as clean as when he entered it – if possible, still cleaner.

All those to whom Rowton spoke, and whose help he

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asked, refused and warned him against wasting money in a hopeless enterprise. He, however, was so firmly convinced of the soundness of his idea, and of the possibility of carrying it through, that he invested £30,000 of his own money in the experiment. The first house, opened in 1892 in Bond Street, Vauxhall, was a complete success. Two years later Rowton Houses Limited was formed, and to-day owns in London six houses, with 5,161 single bedrooms. The patrons of the London Rowton Houses consist of clerks, artisans, labourers, ex-business men, and University graduates. The charges for accommodation are 1s. per night or 6s. 6d. per week.

Many other cities have followed the example, and to-day there are poor men's hotels in Vienna, Frankfort-on-Main, Milan, Copenhagen, Oslo, and New York.

When in 1899 the London County Council wanted to bring the Rowton Houses under its supervision, contending that they were common lodging-houses, the matter was referred to the courts; the judge decided that 'he was unable to see, unless there was a distinction between a cubicle and a bedroom, in what respect a Rowton House differed from a hotel,' and so they maintained their independence.

The last report available, for 1932, shows an authorised capital of £450,000; reserves of £55,000; cash, £21,000; and £77,000 investments in gilt-edged securities. Again, as has been the case from the very start, a dividend of five per cent was paid, after ample writing down for depreciation. On the board of the limited company the family of Shaftesbury-Corry-Rowton is still represented: since the death last year of the Hon. Cecil Ashley<sup>1</sup> (the brother of Evelyn), who was also a member of the Board of the Artisans', Labourers' and General Dwelling Company, founded in 1867, Lord Rowton's nephew, Brigadier General N. A. Lowry-Corry, has taken over his seat on the board.

<sup>1</sup> The Hon. Cecil Ashley, 1849-1933; youngest son of the 7th Earl of Shaftesbury, the philanthropist, for some time Private Secretary to Sir Bartle Frere in South Africa.

## CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE

MONTAGU WILLIAM LOWRY-CORRY, 1ST LORD ROWTON, P.C.,  
K.C.V.O., D.L., 1838-1903

Son of Right Hon. Henry Lowry-Corry, second son of Earl Belmore, and Lady Harriet Ashley, daughter of Cropley Ashley Cooper, 6th Earl of Shaftesbury, sister of 7th Earl of Shaftesbury. (See 'The Private Secretaries' Pedigree.')

Harrow; Cambridge.

1863 Bar (Lincoln's Inn).

1865 Meeting with Disraeli at Raby.

1866-80 Disraeli's Private Secretary.

1866-68 Disraeli's first Ministry.

1868 Mrs. Disraeli created Viscountess Beaconsfield.

1870 Publication of *Lothair*.

1872 Death of Viscountess Beaconsfield.

1874-80 Disraeli's second Ministry.

1876 Disraeli created Earl of Beaconsfield.

1878 Berlin Congress.

C.B.

The Queen offers him the post of Master of the Household.

1880 Corry created Lord Rowton.

Publication of *Endymion*.

Death of Disraeli.

1892 First Rowton House opened.

1894 Formation of Rowton Houses Limited.

1895 Candidate for post of Ambassador in Berlin.

1897 K.C.V.O.

1900 P.C.

The peerage became extinct.

His heir was the then Lieutenant, now Brigadier-General,

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N. A. Noel Lowry-Corry (born 1867, son of Lord Rowton's elder brother), an eminent officer in the Boer War, Queen's Medal with 7 clasps, and Great War. Retired 1919. Director of Rowton Houses Limited, 1932.

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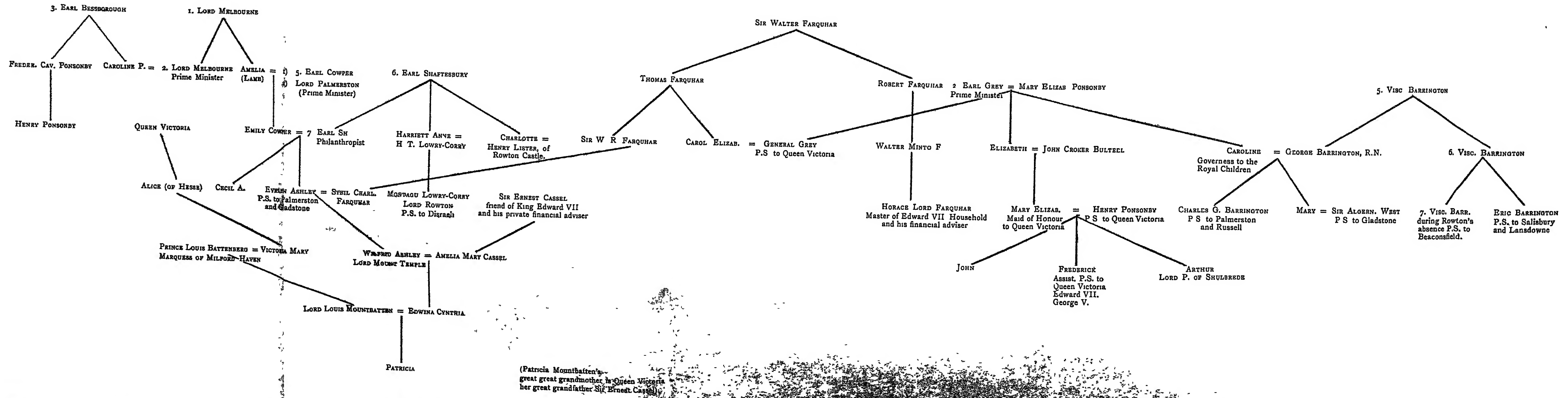
### APPENDIX

When Lord Rowton died, there were found, besides the 'Disraeli papers' which passed to the trustees, 'vast masses' of the Queen's letters to Lord Beaconsfield, 'which stand in a different category.' Sir Almeric Fitzroy reports in his memoirs: 'The Queen, from 1874 to his death, seems to have written to him without reserve on every conceivable subject, personal and political, and as to these Noel [Lowry-Corry] is directed by Rowton's will to take the King's pleasure. One fact comes out from such perusal as he has been able to give them, and that is the persistent and unremitting interference of Prince Leopold in State matters. Not content with influencing the Queen's action in its relation to individuals, he appears to have aimed at being her political guide, and, where the range of her political information was not extensive, his intervention was often the cause of acute difficulty, and always of friction. There is also a large assortment of the Queen's letters to Rowton himself, who, during the last ten or fifteen years of her life, stood to her in most confidential relations, which his superlative tact and self-effacement never permitted to become a grievance. These letters he has been directed to go through and burn, without reading anything that looks as if it was meant to meet no other eyes – a sufficiently arduous discretion to exercise. I advised him, before making the existence of these known to the King, to take into his confidence Edwards,<sup>1</sup> who, as the Queen's most trusted and confidential servant and only executor, outside the Royal Family, was in the best position to give him counsel, and might be depended upon for the most loyal assistance that devotion to the Queen's memory could supply. . . .'

<sup>1</sup> Sir Fleetwood Edwards, Assistant Private Secretary to Queen Victoria, q.v.



"THE PRIVATE SECRETARIES' PEDIGREE"









# THE AGE OF WEALTH



1.

## THE GREAT TRANSFORMA T

1.



## THE GREAT TRANSFORMATION

ALL men, even of strong and considerable individuality, are the product of their time, are advanced or retarded by it. Only very rarely has a great and outstanding personality succeeded, not merely in not being subject to the period in which he lived, but also in being able to shape his age, to impress his stamp upon it. The effect of such an individuality can become so strong and so general that its influence affects the outlook of a whole nation. Later on, then, History gives to the age in which such a personality arose, his name.

If it is possible to a creative genius, possessed of no other means of expression than language or his art, to exercise such an influence on his times, how much more numerous and strong are the means at the disposal of a Monarch. The Constitution of this country in particular grants to the Ruler a many-sided position which rises into symbolism and borders on to mysticism. In the name of the King of England it is decided what is right and what wrong, the law is administered, rewards and penalties are given, and, so far as concerns his personal conduct and his way of looking at everyday matters, he is the pattern on which millions model themselves. The sphere of his influence, however, is not based on the Constitution alone; tradition also has its share. Thus the King is the Head of the State, of the Church, and, in addition, the Leader of Society. Owing to this many-sidedness, the Monarch can influence from the most varied points of view the inner growth of the country, not only its administrative Government; he can promote or delay its development, can adapt himself to the spirit of the age, but can also harden himself against it. The stronger the personality on the Throne, the stronger is this impression. The

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sphere of influence of a Monarch ready to shoulder responsibility became extensive and outstanding in the life of the nation when for six decades – that is, for two complete generations – it placed on the country the stamp of his individuality.

Apart from a few intervals of inner weariness, Victoria, both in her youth and her old age, held with untiring energy and indefatigable zeal the post appointed to her at the head of the State which, towards the end of the century, was face to face with problems, both at home and abroad, very different from those which had to be solved sixteen years after the death of Napoleon.<sup>1</sup> But even the ageing Queen always knew, although sometimes complaining and often hindering rather than assisting, how to adapt herself to the changed political outlook. Apart from her Constitutional duties, however, in her traditional tasks the Queen was, from her earliest years, except the very first time perhaps, inclined to fall short. Stockmar and the Prince Consort, the strongest and in effect her most far-reaching advisers, had changed the merry, cheerful English disposition of the young Princess; thus the foundations were laid in the Queen of those stern views, that hard outlook on life, which with the years developed into the most regrettable intolerance. These two counsellors had made the Queen one-sided in her conception of her Royal calling – had, so to say, bureaucratised her; ever prejudiced, they saw in all proposals and measures submitted by Whitehall to the Sovereign nothing but opportunities for a one-sided fight with the Constitution, to violate which her Ministers never – or at any rate very rarely – had the slightest intention. In addition to this, they took

<sup>1</sup> In order to show clearly the extraordinary stretch of time included in the reign of Victoria, it will be interesting to draw an arc over the line of time, taking as its centre point 1837, the year of her accession. The half-circle crosses the line at 1901, when Victoria died, and at 1773. In that year the Boston Rebellion over the tea duties broke out – the start of the long fight for American Independence. In 1773 Napoleon and Wellington were both four years of age, in 1773 George III had been on the Throne for thirteen years, and it was not till forty-seven years later that George IV took his place.

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no notice of the claims of tradition, and this for the reason that they knew nothing of it, were not and could not be familiar with it. After the death of both the Consort and Stockmar, the Queen for forty years stood almost alone, for none of the successive personal advisers was allowed to exercise any deep and far-reaching influence, and she believed herself compelled to renounce that of her son; thus the Queen, who clung more and more strongly to the past, gradually became so estranged from the present, refusing to make any compromise, that in the end she believed that she could put a stop to any natural development which she definitely would not recognise. This was bound to end in failure, and did end in failure, and in this lay the tragedy of her old age. Even Victoria's majestic greatness collapsed: time was stronger, and trod down antiquated conceptions.

In her seclusion, from which no influence could draw her, the Queen had forgotten that it is the traditional duty of an English Sovereign to be not only the Ruler of the wide circles which for centuries had been the strongest in the country, but also to be the magnificent, widely visible, and hospitable leader. But Victoria stood apart from Society instead of at its head, as she ought to have and could have done; she had placed herself outside it, and left it to its own devices. If the Queen had taken her share in the social life of her nobility, she would have been in a position to influence and direct the change in its grouping and composition which in the course of years had become unavoidable. As it was, there arose a new Society without her, and there was an Edwardian Society long before Albert Edward was King. It is with this Society that the Edwardian age itself began.

On its own impulse, almost unconsciously, this Society had gradually drifted away from the old Victorian ideas; not only, however, had the ideas of those who by birth and position 'belonged there' undergone a change, but an entirely new section of leaders had arisen and come forward. Men stepped into the foreground, not merely because they



## BEHIND THE THRONE

aimed to be in the limelight and wanted to have their place in the sun, but because they had become important – even indispensable.

An age grown exacting was no longer satisfied with the rare and still simple hospitality of the Royal Court. The reins which slipped out of the hands of Buckingham Palace were taken up by Marlborough House. There they understood that section of Society which wanted not the stiff etiquette ruling at Windsor, but the free and easy life offered by Sandringham, which was attracted, not by the seclusion of Osborne, but by the appeal of Cowes to wider circles. When, with a display of temperament which bore no relation to the task asked of her, Victoria refused to open a bridge or Parliament in person, or to modernise Court functions, the Queen not merely incurred the displeasure of those whose request she refused, but in so doing she estranged the country from herself and from the Crown. Edward and his generation, on the other hand, catered for the eye also; in their *joie de vivre* they loved gorgeous festivities and public pomp; but the wise man also recognised their value as *ratio regis*.

The passing from the Victorian to the Edwardian age was no sudden break, no end and beginning, but a slow adaptation to the drifting of the times which had become very materialistic. The beginning of the era which history calls Victorian may be fixed to a day; it began at that moment when the Archbishop of Canterbury and Lord Conyngham in Kensington Palace told the girl of barely eighteen, who, from the very first moment, knew exactly what she wanted, that she was now Queen of England. But it did not end with the death of the Queen; long ere this the age of Edward had started.

The last third of the reign of Victoria had already stood under the sign of the new political Imperialism, which, however, did not come into contact with life at Court; Buckingham Palace remained insular; Marlborough House

## THE GREAT TRANSFORMATION

became an international centre. The Edwardian age's first *lux* did not shine *ex oriente*, it came *ex meridie*; its first dawn began when the first diamonds were found in South Africa, and it grew stronger when a start was made with the industrial prospecting for the gold found on the Witwatersrand; the sharp upward curve of the gold output in the Transvaal shows at the same time how strong was the increase of the influence of Edwardian men. The gold found on the other side of the Vaal River changed the face of England, and first and foremost the views and prejudices of Society; this gold brought with it new Captains of Colonisation and Industry, men who grew powerful on the Stock Exchange, in finance, and eventually also in politics. The Edwardian age had become an accomplished fact when in the clubs of Piccadilly and round St. James's Square members no longer waited till one of their number, returning from the City, told them of the day's happenings, but had, on the appearance of the evening paper, themselves read with understanding eyes how things looked on 'Change. Not only had the Stock Exchange found the way to Park Lane, but Mayfair had turned towards the City, and the Edwardian régime was in full swing when the first peer's son, pacemaker for the many who came after him, went to a stockbroker as half-commission man.

In the Edwardian Society which arose in this manner, the peerage had been compelled to abandon its exclusiveness; from Marlborough House the smart set of financiers and millionaires was launched. In the old set there were families who rebelled against the change and reconstitution of their class, which was eventually to lose its existence – Society also had its Diehards – and who, dissatisfied with the present, looked back yearningly to the good old times when everything was so much better. The heir to the Throne was not one of these; it was under his banner behind the Throne that the transformation took place. Rank, intellect, wit, stepped into the background, and 'distinction gave way to

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brilliance.' At all times and in all countries new wealth sought connections with ancient Society, and marriage was ever the democratising leveller between the rival camps of aristocracy and plutocracy. Ever the scion of a great house has been very willing to gild his shield afresh with new gold; ever have there been wealthy fathers whom it flattered some day to become the grandfathers of peers' sons. At first well-dowered brides were imported from America, but, in the Edwardian age, home country and Empire could themselves produce them. And so Society was in the beginning intermixed with plutocracy, and this amalgamation gave rise to the new aristocracy.

It was said that the Queen had kept Society 'respectable'; that Edward had made it 'smart.' Dicta in epigrammatic form must always be looked at with suspicion, and the same applies here. Old-fashioned heaviness had indeed been replaced by a lighter view of life, and of *fin-de-siècle* London it could no longer be said that 'the general aspect of Society is profound gravity. People look serious at a ball, at a dinner, or a ride on horseback or in a carriage, in Parliament or at Court, in the theatres or at galleries.' The whole world had grown more broad-minded in its views and moral conceptions, was emancipated from old and worn-out prejudices, but was not for this reason any the less 'respectable.' There had been scandals under Queen Victoria just as much as later, only they had been taken more tragically. Under Edward, people lived more rapidly than formerly and had neither inclination nor time to throw stones. An artificially dammed love of life broadened out when Edward ascended the Throne, and was in a hurry to make up for lost time, as if it had had a foreboding that things would not after all go on like this for long, and would come to an end much too soon.

In the long years of waiting and inactive looking on, the Prince of Wales had opened communications in all directions; he knew Frenchmen, Americans, Germans, Hungarians; he counted among his friends men from all countries

## THE GREAT TRANSFORMATION

and all continents, and had personal relations with more foreign politicians than any one of his Ministers. As King he not only refused to give up the circle which had provided the Prince with stimulation and pleasure; he intended to cultivate it all the more, for by its means alone, and not through his official staff, could he remain in touch with the views and the requirements of his time, which were quite different and far more complicated than those of his predecessor on the Throne. No one who did not daily have his finger on the pulse of life could in those days have been a good Sovereign, and the reason why Edward was such a good King is that he thoroughly knew his generation, and the men who were of influence in it. Edward was an active man of the day; no ancient recollections or prejudices impeded his path. Every hour had to be taken hold of and used up in work and in the exercise of his delightful profession, from the moment when, at the age of almost sixty, he ascended the Throne – an age at which Victoria had already reigned for more than forty-one years. Edward's preparation for his *métier* was quite different from that of his mother, hence he 'ruled' less than she did, but his influence on politics was the stronger, and his mastery of the diplomatic chessboard was that of an old expert. In a period so strongly Imperialistic, politics and finance were much more interwoven than ever before, and many considerations in foreign politics were influenced by economic interests. No official staff, whether grown old in routine work or formed in his own school, would have sufficed at such a time and for such a Sovereign who expected so much from himself and who had no time for a slower *tempo*. Gratefully he retained around him men who had been with him, in some cases for very many years, and in days not always easy, to whom he was accustomed and who were accustomed to him and his methods. But in the age of the building of the Bagdad Railway, of the fight for the petroleum wells, or the settlement of the problems raised by the South African mines, the

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range of the advisers had to be broadened by the inclusion of men who were in constant touch with business; who were able, unfettered by official considerations, and looking at things broadly, to put their knowledge and their experience at the disposal of the Sovereign. So there were added to the advisory staff, to Knollys, Probyn, Frederick Ponsonby, Farquhar, Holzmann, a circle of friends in great positions in life, amongst whom were Sir Blundell Maple, Sir Thomas Lipton, Viscount Esher, the brothers Leopold and Alfred de Rothschild, various members of the Sassoon family, and above all, Sir Ernest Cassel.

1.

## ‘THE ROYAL ENCLOSURE’

1.





ERNEST CASSEL

*Vanity Fair*





## ‘THE ROYAL ENCLOSURE’

**A**MONGST the men in official position at the Court of Edward, Dighton Probyn was the most Victorian Farquhar the most Edwardian type. Horace Farquhar belonged to an old family the members of which had for centuries provided the State with trusty servants; amongst the descendants of Sir Walter there may be mentioned, as falling within the scope of this book, his granddaughter Caroline Elizabeth, the wife of General Grey, the Private Secretary of the Queen; his great-granddaughter, Sybille Charlotte, who married Evelyn Ashley, the Private Secretary of Palmerston and Gladstone; and Horace, subsequently Earl Farquhar, the great-grandson; old Sir Walter's great-great-great-granddaughter is Lady Louis Mountbatten, whose grandfather, Sir Ernest Cassel, together with Farquhar, first brought order into the King's financial affairs and subsequently managed them. Of the closer business advisers, Cassel, by far the most successful, was a man of simple origin, whom his financial genius had raised and brought to that position; Farquhar was the aristocrat whom strong business instinct and capacity to make money turned into a business man. To these were added the Rothschilds, bankers, because they had been born as bankers.

Farquhar did not go through the training usual for an office at Court; he was neither officer nor Civil Servant, but a trained banker, finally in the service of Scott's Bank, which was subsequently amalgamated with Parr's Bank, on the board of which he remained for many years. His business activity was extraordinarily successful, so that his advice, like that of every successful man, was often sought and followed. At his instigation Lord Macduff had, before he

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became the son-in-law of the King and Duke of Fife, taken a very profitable part in banking affairs, and was, together with Farquhar, one of the founders of the British South Africa (Chartered) Company. Through the Duke of Fife, Farquhar's relations with the Royal House began. A staunch Conservative, he later turned to active politics, became M.P., and, as Chairman of the London Municipal Society, a zealous promoter of borough administration. After Edward had ascended the Throne, he looked for a man who should modernise the arrangements at Court which, under the Queen, had become altogether too old-fashioned, and organise them on proper business lines. In Farquhar, who, in addition, was looked upon as one of London's 'handsomest and most charming men,' he found the right person. He occupied the office of Master of the Household for a few years only; and the King intended to appoint him Lord Steward (in succession to the Earl of Liverpool). Campbell-Bannerman, however, objected; he saw in Farquhar a political opponent whom he did not wish to hold that high office, with its immense possibilities of influence. Edward VII, ever a strong upholder of the Constitution and anxious to avoid any friction with responsible parties, gave way, although unwillingly. But Farquhar did occupy this eminent post, for which he was quite specially fitted, for seven years, up to the date of his death, under His present Majesty, and devoted in the most unselfish manner his great organising and business capacities to the service of two Sovereigns. He died a rich man, and showed his great affection to the Royal House by leaving, in his will, large sums out of his estate of £400,000 to members of the Royal Family.

The official manager of the King's finances was Sir Dighton Probyn, who at the Court of Edward VII combined the type of the old Victorian courtier with that of a brave officer. Lord Roberts, in his book *Forty-One Years in India*, several times mentioned the 'gallant services' of

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‘young Probyn, and General Sir Hope Grant wrote in his *Journal* that ‘it would indeed be difficult to imagine a more brilliant, dashing, daring irregular officer than Lieutenant Probyn,’ whose outstanding services in India and China were rewarded with the V.C. which – a rare case indeed – he wore for sixty-seven years. The gallant officer did not take on an easy task when, in the latter part of the seventies, he became Treasurer to the Prince of Wales, and he must assuredly have spent many an uneasy hour; to his foresight and his tact it is due that the usual commission to inquire into the financial position of the new King – of which, in addition to Arthur Balfour and Sir William Harcourt, Sir Blundell Maple, the great Tottenham Court Road business man, was a member – was able to report that Edward VII had ascended ‘unencumbered by a single penny of debt.’ For thirty-three years Probyn was in charge of the treasury of his master, as manager rather than in search of new means, for with time and from necessity Albert Edward had himself acquired a knowledge of financial affairs which was much helped by an aptitude for monetary transactions. After the death of the King, Probyn for another fourteen years, and up to the time of his death, took charge of the financial interests of Queen Alexandra. The ‘great gentleman’ who for fifty-two years served his King and his Queen, received both the civil and the military G.C.B., and was the only one outside the Royal Family who possessed these decorations.

Lord Esher, who even during his lifetime was looked upon as somewhat of a man of mystery, died only a little over four years ago, and it is not easy to fit him into the mosaic of Edwardian figures. He was able, cultured, wielded an elegant pen, and of such varied attainments that he was actively engaged in history, finance, politics, art, literature, and military organisation. He understood everything, and his activities went even beyond the above-named; he was highly resourceful, and ‘displayed that easy spirit of accommodation to circumstances which has always been one of the

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secrets of his success.' To the King he became of great assistance in a curious and adroit manner; in the archives at Windsor he had thoroughly examined the correspondence between Victoria and her Ministers, and had drawn up a study of the numerous expressions of her wishes. Prepared by this achievement, Esher was always ready, whenever a question of politics arose, to put his master wise as to the manner in which an analogous case had been previously decided. (Thus he reconstructed for the use of the son the Queen's marvellous memory.) It need hardly be pointed out that in many circles this kind of advice was not greatly appreciated, and Esher was not looked upon with favour. His considerable knowledge of the archives and of the Queen's correspondence led subsequently to his being appointed, in the interests of the Court, to edit, together with Arthur Christopher Benson, the first three volumes of the *Letters of Queen Victoria*. Esher by himself subsequently edited the diaries and letters from Victoria's younger days, under the title of *The Girlhood of Queen Victoria*. The list of books from Esher's pen is considerable, and comprises, in the main, sections of the history of his own times. An article in the *Quarterly Review* immediately after the King's death, 'The Character of King Edward VII,' is by Esher. He held a number of the most varied posts, but no really great post, either in the Government or at Court. He did not wish to be tied, and above all was anxious not to have any liability if it could in any way be avoided; but, as soon as the necessity arose, he shouldered full responsibility. Both as M.P. and outside the House, Esher was much occupied with politics, but was not a great politician. Although he spent his whole life in the public eye, he did not like making speeches, and was a poor speaker. As negotiator, as obliging and courteous go-between, on the other hand, he was in his element, be it at the request of the King in a political matter, or at the request of a friend in a question of finance. He knew many people in England and abroad, could tell anecdotes of life

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and politics, of committee-room and finance, and, as he was really well informed, he was always in a position to talk; this, more than anything else, helped the appreciation which the King had for him. The career of young ‘Reggie’ Brett began when very unwillingly he became Private Secretary to Lord Hartington (Duke of Devonshire), and assisted his chief first at the India Office and later at the War Office; it was here that he acquired the foundations for his subsequent important and successful activities. Then Brett became Secretary of the Office of Works and had the brilliant idea of giving the Queen great pleasure on her eightieth birthday by sending her a box ‘made out of one of the original timbers in the roof of Westminster Hall, of the time of William Rufus, 1099,’ which brought him this entry in the journal; but apart from this slight episode his activities at the Office of Works were of outstanding importance to him when in the nineties, on the occasion of the negotiations concerning the reorganisation and reconstruction of the Royal palaces, he made the acquaintance of the Heir Apparent; he came in touch with him again, as Sovereign, when he represented his department in the discussions as to the Coronation ceremonies. From this time on, Esher’s connection with the King was lasting, and the first proof of the Royal confidence was his appointment to the commission of inquiry into the South African War, on which he displayed great energy. He was Chairman of the Commission on the War Office Reconstruction, which, as the ‘Esher Committee,’ has found its place in history.

A man like Esher, who behind the Throne saw, experienced, and brought about many things, should be in a position to tell posterity much; from Esher’s numerous notes and papers it should be possible for historians to fill in many territories which up to now appear as blanks on the map of the Edwardian age. But Lord Esher was not only a mysterious but also a cautious and tactful man, and in his will he appointed that his most intimate documents should be

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sealed up and not opened till 1981. A future generation alone will receive an explanation from Lord Esher's papers of many things which to-day are dark, and perhaps it will also get many a surprise.

The King, who had friends in every camp, in every circle, found his greatest friend not in those classes who looked upon it as their traditional right to form the *entourage* of the Sovereign, and did not choose him from among the families who for centuries had been accustomed to serve the King as official advisers or behind the Throne. He came from among those who had their Court centre in Marlborough House, and only after Edward's accession enjoyed the hospitality of the Palace also. Sir Ernest Cassel actually belonged to no caste at all; he was not a banker, nor head of a great business house or chief director of any board. But he was a personage. His career gives the impression of a 'romance of finance,' and it was said of him that he never carried out a transaction which had not originated and ripened in his own brain, and that he rejected every project which was brought and submitted to him. Such a man, who had met with unprecedented success, was bound to find favour in the sight of Edward, who was himself equipped with pronounced business instincts, and who surely would have become just as great a financier as he became a great King if he had not been born in the cradle of the Heir Apparent. The enormous fortune which Cassel made in a relatively short time – his independent activities in the City lasted barely twenty years – gave him an immense power which – and herein lay his strength – he never misused; he was 'quick in perception, clear in judgment, almost unerring,' and consequently wisely kept away from everything which lay outside his scope. A personality of such strength, brought by his Sovereign into so high and exposed a light, was bound in the nature of things to be judged in the most varied ways. Of the many character sketches which were given of him – the King on one occasion called him 'the cleverest head in

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England’ – Lady Oxford perhaps uttered the most striking: ‘He was a man of natural authority, who from humble beginnings became a financier of wealth and importance. He had no small talk and disliked gossip; he was dignified, autocratic, and wise.’ He never did a deal which he had not himself studied in every detail, and when he turned his interests to the South American countries, that implied that he had previously made the most thorough examination of the budgets, the trade and financial balance sheets, and the currency conditions of those countries. Thus he was able to be an authoritative and valuable adviser to the Bank of England when, after the Argentine stopped payment, a private banking house of the very first rank was temporarily forced to close its doors – a bank the collapse of which would have entailed immeasurable difficulties. The next stage in Cassel’s affairs was Mexico; he took a leading interest in the Mexican railways, and negotiated large loans for that country. Another extensive field for his activities lay in the rising industries of Sweden. In England it is two great undertakings which are bound up with the name of Cassel; he amalgamated the then firm of Vickers Sons & Co. with the Naval Construction Company at Barrow-in-Furness and the Maxim-Nordenfeldt Guns and Ammunition Company, a fusion from which arose the world-wide firm of Vickers Sons & Maxim; the other great undertaking was the foundation of the Central London Railway Company, which built London’s first underground tube. Cassel’s real field of activities, however, was Egypt, which he brought to modern progress and development. Before Cassel, that country was the playground of financial and commercial dilettanti and adventurers, and tumbled from one suspension of payment into another – after Cassel it had become a part of the British Empire whose banks and commercial activities were functioning perfectly. To Cassel’s financial genius Egypt is indebted for the solution of its ancient problem, dating back to biblical times, on modern technical lines, when the firm



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of John Aird & Co. built the great dam at Assouan, and the blessing of fertility was brought to the Nile Valley. To have carried out this undertaking in the face of every opposition and intrigue was a triumph of financial diplomacy, and Cassel is entitled to a place in the large number of empire builders. Sir Ernest had at various times carried through some very great deals in the United States, and he placed his knowledge of men and conditions there at the disposal of his country when, in the second year of the Great War, he joined Lord Reading's Mission to arrange the hundred million seven per cent loan. In spite of his incontestable services to this country, Cassel, like so many not British born, was during the war faced with the greatest difficulties, and his right to membership of the Privy Council formed the subject-matter of legal proceedings which to-day strike us as very painful, and in which Cassel was successful. In spite of this injury, and 'in spite of the sufferings that our contemptible spy-hunters caused him during the war, no one was ever more loyal or generous to the country of his adoption' (Lady Oxford). His generosity, like everything else pertaining to Cassel, was magnificent, and he was 'a veritable prince of charity.' The donations which during his lifetime he made to hospitals and educational institutions must have amounted to several millions, if it is remembered that on the occasion of the accession of his Royal friend he gave £200,000 for a radium institute, and in the last three years of his life £500,000 for the promotion of education among the working classes, £200,000 for sanatoria for tuberculosis, and £225,000 for a hospital for nervous diseases. The organisation built up and worked out on very extensive lines for German-English scholarships, which Cassel presented and named after the King, belongs, like so many pre-war ideals and establishments, to the things of the past. As a sportsman Sir Ernest was not particularly successful, and he only managed to win one of the classic races with his stud and training stables (the mere fact that he tried his

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luck on the turf does not seem to fit in with the whole character of the man). In Moulton Paddocks, Newmarket, he entertained the King every year for several days. How strong were the undercurrents and prejudices which – even before the war – were working from many sides against Cassel, although he really was not lacking in influential friends, may be seen from the fact that it was not until thirteen years after the registration of his colours that he was elected a member of the Jockey Club.

Within the inner circle of the friends of Edward VII, Sir Ernest Cassel was among those who had a knowledge of actualities, who knew what was happening. But none of them had the King's attention to the same extent and so regularly as Sir Ernest. His political ideal also was the *rapprochement* between England and Germany, and together with his friends Alfred de Rothschild here and Albert Ballin there, he tried to prepare the respective Governments for direct negotiations.<sup>1</sup> But to the great loss of the whole world the plan did not go beyond preparations.

In his last hour of clear consciousness Edward VII received his old friend, and, when Cassel left him about noon on May 6th, 1910, he felt that it was for the last time. Shortly after, the King became unconscious, and at a quarter before midnight he died.

In an entirely different category from Farquhar and Cassel were business men like the Rothschilds. In that generation their world-important banking house no longer looked for fresh fields of activity, but was satisfied if it held what it owned. The firm was run on definite principles, on a kind of family constitution, and the various partners, who all had to be members of the family, were allowed little scope for individuality. Since Lionel's death his eldest son, Nathaniel, subsequently Lord Rothschild, was the head of the house and the keeper of the tradition; his brothers

<sup>1</sup> See p. 299.

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Leopold<sup>1</sup> and Alfred<sup>1</sup> were less prominent in affairs. With great hospitality and in a princely manner they led the lives of *grands seigneurs*, had an ever-open hand, spoke many languages, were independent men of the world . . . and it was natural that Albert Edward should find them congenial. Thanks to their international family relationships and still more extended business connections, they knew the whole world, were well informed about everybody, and had reliable knowledge even of matters which did not appear on the surface. This combination of finance and politics had been a tradition with the Rothschilds from the very beginning, and, even if New Court no longer influenced politics by way of the Rue Laffitte, yet in this generation also assistance was always granted to the departments concerned. The wires which met in New Court came from many directions, and ever since the days of Nathan Meyer special importance had been attached to the obtaining of rapid and reliable information. True, the age of the telegraph and the telephone – there was no radio in those days – had killed the individuality of private reports; the newspaper had become a democratic leveller. All the same, the House of Rothschild always knew more than could be found in the newspapers, and even more than could be read in the reports which arrived at the Foreign Office. In other countries also the relations of the Rothschilds extended behind the Throne. Not until the numerous diplomatic publications appeared in the years after the war, the many memoirs of statesmen and diplomatists written since those days, did a wider public learn how strongly Alfred de Rothschild's hand affected the politics of Central Europe during the twenty years before

<sup>1</sup> Leopold de Rothschild, C.V.O., 1845–1917, married Maria Perugia. In 1879 'Mr. Acton's' Sir Bevy's, in 1904 L. de Rothschild's St Amant, won the Derby, in 1896, St Frusquin was second.

Alfred de Rothschild, C.V.O., 1842–1918, Trustee of the National Gallery and the Wallace Collection, 1868–90, Director of the Bank of England. In 1884, house-warming at Halton House, Tring, where in 1898 the negotiations between Joseph Chamberlain and Count Hatzfeld, German Ambassador, took place.

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the war. His greatest exertions lay in the direction of an English-German alliance, and he worked on both sides towards the conclusion of this; he it was who succeeded in arranging that Joseph Chamberlain and the German Ambassador should meet under his roof at Halton, and be able to discuss at their ease various political questions. Sir Ernest Cassel and Albert Ballin, the head of the Hamburg-America Line, subsequently unofficially, but with the knowledge of both Governments, carried on the negotiations so far that Haldane's official visit to Berlin took place. That during those days Cassel was, we may say incognito, present in the German capital in order to bring Haldane and his German friends together, and to promote the discussions in every way, was not known till much later. But all these exertions met with no success – and the only visible sign remaining of that journey, which started so hopelessly, is a portrait of Haldane which Cassel had painted by Sir Arthur Cope and which hung at Brook House till the death of Cassel, and was then presented to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council.

Alfred, with his somewhat robust wit, reminded one rather of the older generation of the Rothschilds, and was not overfond of reading books. Alfred's great luxury was not without its peculiarities, but his good humour and wide hospitality induced people to pass these over. When, after the death of his wife, Beaconsfield found himself without a home of his own, Alfred on various occasions put 'a suite of independent rooms . . . in the most charming of houses in London' at his disposal, and this so tactfully that the aged statesman would make his own arrangements, while the host, in order to make his guest feel entirely his own master, hardly put in an appearance. 'He is the kindest host in the world,' wrote Disraeli, and it was from Alfred's house that he took part in the festivities on the occasion of Leopold de Rothschild's marriage with the lovely Maria Perugia, when, in an after-dinner speech, he stated that if

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'always had been of the opinion that there cannot be too many Rothschilds.' Albert Edward also had been present at the wedding of his friend 'Lco.' Thirty-six years earlier, when the young husband of that day had made his first appearance in the world, Disraeli had written to his father Lionel that he hoped that the new-born infant 'will prove worthy of his pure and sacred race.'

In his newly built house at Halton, where Albert Edward had been among those present at the house-warming, Alfred de Rothschild likewise displayed a 'lavish generosity'; the new domain had not met with unalloyed approval, and Algernon West describes it as 'an exaggerated nightmare of gorgeousness and senseless and ill-applied magnificence,' calling Leopold's house at Ascot, on the other hand, 'a beautiful and glorified old mansion.' At the outbreak of the world war, Alfred de Rothschild placed his country house at the disposal of the State, and during the war it formed the headquarters of the Royal Air Force. When he died, his cousin, Lady Battersea, wrote the following lines to his memory:

*What happiness didst thou not erst bestow!  
What times of gladsome cheeriness and mirth!  
When thou wast host there never was a dearth  
Of kindly hospitality and cheer, a flow  
Of gracious courtesy, a welcome kind  
To all alike whom e'er thou claimest guest.*

And Queen Alexandra caused a wreath of flowers from Sandringham to be placed on the grave of the friend of her late husband.

Like Alfred, Leopold was a collector of works of art and a connoisseur, but in addition he was an exceedingly keen sportsman, master of hounds, and the owner of a great and successful racing stable which won for him once – or twice – the Derby: the first time when 'Mr. Acton's'<sup>1</sup> Sir Bevy

<sup>1</sup> See p. 301 note

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won the blue riband for his anonymous owner; the second time with St. Amant. When that great horse, St. Frusquin, ran second at Epsom to the Prince of Wales's Persimmon, Lord Rosebery, Leopold's friend, sports-associate and relative, had an amusing conversation with his valet: 'When I said to my servant John that I supposed everyone would believe that every horse had been stopped to enable the Prince of Wales to win the Derby, he replied, "No doubt, but I am bound to tell your Lordship that many people thought the same thing when Ladas won and you were Prime Minister."' '

When Leopold had for five and thirty years been a partner in the firm of N. M. Rothschild & Sons, and had reached the age of almost seventy, he found himself head of the house during the last two years of his life, after the death of his brother Nathaniel. Up to now he had played no great part in the City, and had never been prominent; now, however, he did not for one moment shrink from taking over the many offices and posts which his brother had held. His most marked trait was 'his deep and abiding love for, and pride in, his race and faith' (Lady Battersea), and he said on one occasion, 'I am a Jew and a Rothschild, and they are the two things of which I am most proud.' Both brothers had, together with Nathaniel, given enormous sums for charitable and artistic purposes and for hospitals, but Leopold possessed to a quite special extent the 'great art in giving, and that art was natural to him.' When Leopold, who in the world war had lost his son,<sup>1</sup> had himself, like his two brothers Nathaniel and Alfred, died during its course, Lord Rosebery spoke these words to his memory: 'I know of no death of a private individual which will be followed by more general sorrow, for all his life he was encompassed

<sup>1</sup> Evelyn Achille de Rothschild was the last owner of Gunnersbury, the first country house of the Rothschilds, which Nathan Meyer had acquired shortly before his death but had not lived to occupy. Since 1926, Gunnersbury Park, situated at Acton, has been a public park. The name of 'Mr. Acton' which Leopold de Rothschild occasionally assumed on the Turf arose from this ownership.

## BEHIND THE THRONE

by love and gratitude, the universal tribute to his great heart.'

Of all the members of his Court, Sir Maurice Holzmann, a native of Anhalt, was the first who entered the service of the Prince of Wales; he had belonged to the *entourage* of Prince Albert, which had a good opinion of the German immigrant. His forty-six-year-long activity in the service of his master had been spent more in the background, and his name had not been too often heard in public. He was a highly educated man, whose systematic knowledge was combined with the Liberal views ruling at the Court of Albert Edward. His great intelligence – there were those who considered him the cleverest mind in the *entourage* of the Prince and King – was often appealed to, and so, although not widely known, he must be included in the advisory staff.

The Knolles, as they formerly wrote their name, have for centuries been in the service of the Throne, the first one having, more than five hundred years ago, been Usher of the Chamber to Henry VII. Since the days of General Sir William Knollys, who instructed the Prince Consort in English military matters, and who subsequently succeeded General Bruce as Governor of the young Prince of Wales, the name of Knollys has been constant in the list of holders of offices at Court. The General's daughter Charlotte was, as Bedchamber Woman, the lifelong friend of Queen Alexandra. Colonel Sir Henry was for almost five and twenty years Private Secretary to Queen Maud of Norway, the daughter of the King and Queen. There were many Knollyses – *the* Knollys was Francis.

His career may be summarised in one sentence: Mr. Knollys, Sir Francis, Lord, and finally Viscount Knollys was for nearly fifty years in the service of Albert Edward and his family, for forty years the Private Secretary of his master. He was on one occasion called 'the most powerful man in England,' but this was not quite correct. Real power – that

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is to say, energy manifested in action – he did not exercise and, if he had, he could not have been the strong, unassailable adviser behind the Throne; what he did exercise was influence – a level and wise influence on the King.

Knollys shared every experience of the Prince, lived with him through every stage of the occasionally difficult days of the Heir Apparent, the quickly running nine years on the Throne which seemed to comprise a generation; he lived the master’s life in such complete self-effacement that any attempt at writing a biography of Knollys must result in a biography of Edward VII. The faithful servant, chosen by the Prince himself in the face of his mother’s objections, was thirty-three when he entered the service of Albert Edward who was four years younger. For nearly thirty years they had to wait, united in comradeship and gradually in friendship, till their own time came. This long period they had to prepare themselves each for his profession, one as King the other as first adviser behind the Throne. Both made good use of their time, and both, attuned to each other, knew what they wanted. On questions and problems arising in the most varied departments of the life of the State – politics, diplomacy, Army, Navy, and Constitution – they had to make their position clear, and Knollys proved himself not merely a man with a wide experience of life, but also a politician of no mean standing, and it may be assumed that Edward’s Liberal views owe something to him. It is difficult to imagine how anyone else could have dealt with the host of problems which he had to face in his office and Edward VII could not have found a better man.

Knollys knew everything, great and small, the smallest being often the most difficult, and he knew how to keep silent even beyond the grave. All documents, all correspondence of the King, were left to him to be dealt with at his unfettered discretion, and the secrets have one and all been buried with him. Even after his death, Francis Knollys has no surprises in store for posterity.



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His assistant was Sir Frederick Ponsonby, who as a young man worked under the Queen, and since then has rendered confidential and responsible services first to her son and then to His present Majesty, and during four decades – his whole life – has been in the service of the Throne.

In the years of the reign of Edward VII, with his strong international leanings and relations, the Assistant Private Secretary's extensive knowledge of foreign languages was particularly useful, as Knollys, the chief, knew many things, but no foreign language. During the King's journeys abroad Knollys stayed in London, retained touch with the various Government Departments, and kept the Sovereign informed of all that happened; Ponsonby was meanwhile the real acting Private Secretary, the travelling-companion. During the first years of the reign he was in Cronberg, where the King paid a private visit to his hopelessly sick sister, and in the foreword of the *Letters of the Empress Frederick*, published by Sir Frederick, there is a most absorbing description of the way in which he succeeded in removing from the Palace and bringing to England the chest containing correspondence which the dying Empress had entrusted to him. He accompanied the King to Portugal and Italy, Biarritz and Marienbad, and was with him on the two great political visits to Paris and Reval. Frederick's brother Arthur<sup>1</sup> had in Parliament raised the sharpest opposition to the journey to Russia, which brought him into personal conflict with the Sovereign; we may look upon it as impossible that in any other monarchical country, or even any republic, such independence of opinion and such freedom of expression in political debate could have been found as was shown in this case; for neither of the two brothers did the event have any consequences whatsoever – not even for the one who, at the side of his master, was sailing into Russian waters. Frederick Ponsonby was with Edward VII as acting Private Secretary when Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman handed in his

<sup>1</sup> See pp. 162 and 191.



ALFRED DE ROTHSCHILD

*Vanity Fair*



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resignation and Mr. Asquith was summoned there to kiss hands; this occurrence was sharply criticised; disapproval was expressed that a Prime Minister should be appointed on foreign soil, and *The Times* spoke of ‘an inconvenient and dangerous departure from precedent.’ Under a man like Edward VII, whose methods of obtaining information were confined almost exclusively to conversations with a wide circle of men from all camps, and to endless reports from his *entourage*, a Secretary like Ponsonby, who maintained the best relations in all directions, was a valuable complement to Knollys, the Principal Secretary.

June 6th of this year was the fortieth anniversary of the day on which Victoria entered in her diary, ‘. . . Fritz Ponsonby will replace him<sup>1</sup> as Equerry. He will be very useful, as he is a good linguist and is well informed. Sir H. Ponsonby is naturally greatly pleased at his son’s appointment.’ What the Queen at that time expected from the young man of seven and twenty who had already had a good look at the world, and of his capabilities, the grown man has fulfilled. Sir Frederick’s lively reminiscences of a man born in the Palace, grown up at Court, who stood in the most intimate *entourage* of three Monarchs, go far beyond his actual years of service, and comprise not much short of half a century. He embodies at the Court of George V, since the death of Lord Stamfordham, the last remnant of Victorian tradition.

<sup>1</sup> Sir H. Ewart, who on that day was appointed Crown Equerry.

## CHRONOLOGICAL TABLES

HORACE BRAND FARQUHAR,  
FIRST EARL FARQUHAR, P.C., G.C.B., G.C.V.O.,  
1844-1923

1889-1901 M.P.

1901-07 Master of the King's Household.

1907 Campbell-Bannerman opposed the appointment of  
Farquhar as Lord Steward.  
P.C. and Extra Lord in Waiting.

1915-22 Lord Steward.

1917 Viscount.

1922 Earl.

RT. HON. SIR DIGHTON MACNAGHTEN PROBYN,  
P.C., G.C.S.I., G.C.B., G.C.V.O.,  
1833-1924

1849 Entered Army; served in India and China.

1857 Received the V.C. during the Indian Mutiny.

1872-77 Equerry to the Prince of Wales.

1875-76 With the Prince of Wales in India.

1877 Comptroller and Treasurer.

1888 General.

1901-10 Keeper of the Privy Purse to King Edward VII.

1902 G.C.B. Civil.

1910 G.C.B. Military.

1910-24 Comptroller to Queen Alexandra.

1920-24 Extra Equerry to King George V.

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REGINALD BALLIOL BRETT,  
SECOND VISCOUNT ESHER, P.C., G.C.B., K.C.V.O.,  
1852-1930

Royal Trustee British Museum.

Trustee Wallace Collection and London Museum.

Honorary LL.D., Cambridge and St. Andrews.

Hon. Colonel 3rd Batt. Royal Fusiliers.

Son of first Viscount Esher, Master of the Rolls, who died in 1899.

1880-85 M.P. Liberal.

1887 Private Secretary to Lord Hartington (Duke of Devonshire).

1895-1902 Secretary to Office of Works.

1899 Succeeded to title.

Married Eleanor, daughter of Sylvain van de Weyer, Belgian Minister at the Court of St. James's. Van de Weyer was one of the founders of the Belgian Monarchy, and stood in close relations with Stockmar, the trusted adviser of Leopold I, during the negotiations in Brussels.

1901 Lieutenant-Governor of Windsor Castle.

1902 Nominated to the South African War Inquiry Commission.

1904 Chairman of the Committee on War Office Reconstruction ('Esher Committee').

1905 Permanent Member of the Commission of Imperial Defence.

1909-13 Chairman of the Territorial Force Association of the County of London.

1910 Keeper of the King's Archives.

1928 Governor and Constable of Windsor Castle.

He published:

*Footprints of Statesmen* (1892).

*The Yoke of Empire* (1907).

*Letters of Queen Victoria* (1907).

1st series, vols. 1-3; edited together with A. C. Benson.

## BEHIND THE THRONE

*To-day and To-morrow* (1910).

*The Girlhood of Queen Victoria* (edited by E.) (1912).

*Influence of King Edward* (1914).

*After the War* (1918).

*The Tragedy of Lord Kitchener* (1921).

*Ionicus* (1923).

*Cloud-Cap'd Towers* (1927).

RT. HON. SIR ERNEST CASSEL, P.C., G.C.B.,  
G.C.M.G., G.C.V.O.,

1852-1921

- 1891-1911 The years of his strongest business activity in the City.
- 1896 Beginning of intimate relationship with Edward VII.
- 1901 January 4th, marriage of Cassel's only daughter Maud with Mr. Wilfrid Ashley (now Lord Mount Temple), at which Edward VII was present.  
January 22nd, accession of Edward VII.  
Birth of Edwina Ashley; godfather, His Majesty.
- 1902 P.C.
- 1906 G.C.V.O.
- 1907 Close of the reorganisation of the management of the King's finances.
- 1908 Elected Member of the Jockey Club.
- 1909 G.C.B.
- 1915 Went with Lord Reading's mission to America to arrange for £100,000,000 seven per cent loan.
- 1915 His membership of the P.C. questioned.
- 1921 Death.
- 1922 Edwina Ashley, his grandchild, married Lord Louis Mountbatten.

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SIR MAURICE HOLZMANN, K.C.B., G.C.V.O.,  
1835-1909

- 1863-1901 Librarian.
- 1870-86 Private Secretary to Queen Alexandra.
- 1886-1901 Clerk of the Council to the Prince of Wales.
- 1901 Extra Groom in Waiting.

VISCOUNT KNOLLYS, P.C., G.C.B., G.C.V.O., G.C.M.G.,  
1837-1924

- 1868-1901 Gentleman Usher to Queen Victoria.
- 1870-1910 Private Secretary to Prince of Wales and King Edward VII.
- 1875-76 With the Prince of Wales in India.
- 1886-1901 Groom in Waiting to Prince of Wales.
- 1910-13 Private Secretary to King George V.
- 1910 Lord in Waiting to Queen Alexandra.

SIR FREDERICK PONSONBY, P.C., G.C.B., G.C.V.O.,  
DEPUTY CONSTABLE AND LIEUTENANT-GOVERNOR OF WINDSOR  
CASTLE; TREASURER TO H.M. KING GEORGE V.

- 1867 Born.  
Eton.
- 1889 Lieutenant, Grenadier Guards.
- 1893-94 A.D.C. to Lord Lansdowne, Viceroy of India.
- 1894-1901 } Equerry in Ordinary
- 1897-1901 } Assistant Private Secretary
- } Assistant Keeper of Privy Purse } to Queen Victoria.
- 1899 Married Victoria Lily, daughter of the late Colonel Edmund Kennard.
- 1901-10 Equerry in Ordinary
- Assistant Private Secretary
- Assistant Keeper of Privy Purse } to King Edward VII.
- 1901 Cronberg.



## BEHIND THE THRONE

- 1901-02 Boer War.
- 1902 Daughter, Lælia Mary, born; married Duke of Westminster.
- 1903 Son, Edward Gaspard, born (1916-1919, Page of Honour).
- 1910 Equerry in Ordinary
- 1910-12 Assistant Private Secretary
- 1914 Keeper of Privy Purse
- 1914 P.C.
- 1914-18 Great War.
- 1920 Treasurer to King George V.
- 1921 G.C.V.O.
- 1926 G.C.B.

} to King George V.

Sir Frederick is the holder of a particularly large number of foreign decorations.

He published:

*The Grenadier Guards in the Great War* (1920).

*Letters of the Empress Frederick* (1929).

*Sidelights on Queen Victoria* (1930).

## KING EDWARD'S PRIME MINISTERS

- 1901 January 22nd, accession of King Edward VII.  
Lord Salisbury, Prime Minister since June 1895 (third and last Ministry).
- 1902 August, Arthur Balfour.
- 1905 December, Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman.
- 1908 April, H. H. Asquith (until December 1916).
- 1910 May 6th, death of King Edward.

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